

COMING ATCHA', APPALACHIA

by Jim Barroll

Whether you pronounce it Appa-LATCH'-a or Appa-LAY'-cha, the just-released Fall 2019 College for Seniors (CFS) course catalog is chock full of Appalachian-themed course offerings: 24 out of 100 fall term courses. It's a study area likely to surprise with its diverse offerings that include many aspects of the region's history, culture and environment. If that sounds like a lot to squeeze out of one regional theme, there may be more to the Appalachian region than you imagined.

Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) at UNC Asheville Director Catherine Frank says it's likely we all have stereotypes about what Appalachia is. She says the CFS curriculum committees worked to develop this theme to try to break up some of those stereotypes and to suggest reasons why some of them evolved. What better way to start than by looking at the literature, geology and other characteristics that make Appalachia a distinctive place?

While the area is unmistakably distinctive, Catherine says one important goal of this fall's theme is for members not to look at Appalachia as a culture that is unfamiliar. Geographically speaking, it's a region covering much of the eastern United States, extending from Georgia to Maine. In fact, Catherine cites OLLI instructor Gordon McKinney's expansive view of Appalachia that includes New Englanders such as Robert Frost, who is featured in a course on Appalachian poetry. Closer to home, CFS's Math, Science and Technology committee has some inviting course explorations, including, for example, electricity coming to Asheville, looking at how production began with coal and how the region is progressing into water and wind power.

There is also much about the region that sets it apart, and Catherine says from the instructors' point of view it's a great way to get creative. So what's out there for you? Courses are being offered on Appalachian music and literature, as well as classes focusing on the area's flora and fauna--and the ever-popular hiking classes in a region blessed with abundant natural beauty.

Because many of us didn't grow up in the Appalachian region, it can be easy to view this as a foreign place. However, as OLLI members consider this fall's wide range of classes, Director Catherine Frank says she hopes the participants will bridge the difference between seeing Appalachia as a distinct place and as an area that's foreign to their experience .