Dorothy Sulock and Michael Ruiz share their passion with OLLI (page two)

Dot observes, “OLLI students are wiser, they actually care about your subject, they bring more to the table, they have their life experiences and so many things they can tell you about, they ask much better questions; and you don’t have to grade them! Teaching at OLLI is a perfect teaching experience.” A physics professor, Michael agrees, noting that OLLI students “…are passionate and have a sincere thirst for knowledge.”

Of course, teaching seniors can have its surprises. Dot discovered this in an early class she led on “Nuclear Weapons and Non-Proliferation,” a topic on which the math professor is self-taught. Imagine her surprise to learn one of her first OLLI students was a retired 4-star general with first-hand knowledge of her subject!

While Dot admits her focus on nuclear weapons and sustainable energy stems from her desire to “save the world,” Michael’s embrace of musical themes at the College for Seniors was more accidental. The physics professor’s first class was on astronomy. During the break, he sat down and played the piano. After class, a student advised him, “Trust me: don’t do astronomy...play piano.” He happily complied.

Both Dot and Michael offer similar advice to those interested in teaching at OLLI: “Be very prepared, but don’t fake it if you don’t know something. Recognize you need to make things interesting because unlike undergrads, seniors are not obliged to attend if you are boring.”

Michael adds, “Recognize you will never please everyone; you have to let go of that.” He brings passion to the classroom in the style of Sondheim, Mozart, jazz greats, Broadway hits and 50s pop classics. OLLI students pack all his classes, so clearly he needn’t worry!