

Bill O'Connell: Inspirational Lifelong Learner (continued)

by David Langdon

Initially attracted to Asheville and OLLI through our Paths (Paths to Creative Retirement) and CREW (Creative Retirement Exploration Weekend) programs, Bill became fascinated to learn more about all aspects of retirement when he moved here. He wanted to gain a better understanding of how communities cope with an increasing number of retirees and their aging issues. UNC Asheville's Masters of Liberal Arts and Sciences program's retirement component provides the ideal platform for that endeavor.

Bill has identified six communities, similar to Asheville in demographics and retirement issues including housing, health care, and infrastructure. Those cities are: Athens, GA; San Angelo, TX; Boulder, CO; Bismarck, ND; Iowa City, IA; and Rochester, MN. He is communicating with governments in those locations to determine areas of commonality, as well as areas where we might learn from each other.

Bill has developed a 501(c)(3) think tank called "Communities for Older Adult Health," and is also working with a local group to develop a "co-housing community" that will support older adults through many of the normal challenges of aging in an intentional, self-managed community.

His bachelor's degree in cultural anthropology at UC Berkeley launched in him a lifelong interest in many areas of study and work. He earned his MBA at the University of San Francisco. From there, he took a management position with the Illinois Department of Mental Health, followed by a variety of health-related positions and later, association management jobs.

Bill O'Connell is a prime example of so many OLLI members who continue to re-invent themselves through an ongoing investment in lifelong learning. If you're thinking Bill O'Connell's chronic case of lifelong learning is going to benefit your retirement aging process in Asheville and Buncombe County, you'd be on the right track. And we all stand to benefit.