

Once a Bulldog...

by Jim Lenburg

A Georgia bulldog is leading a major effort to connect OLLI more closely to the UNC Asheville bulldog community. Last year the office of the Chancellor challenged the OLLI Steering Committee to participate in the University's Comprehensive Master Plan with ideas that were "big, broad and bold." The task was to explore ways in which OLLI's relationship with the university could be strengthened. The Steering Council assigned the task to the Planning Committee where Sam Harben chaired an ad hoc committee made up of him and three other members.

Sam is a retired attorney who graduated from the University of Georgia and the University's Law School. He practiced law in Gainesville, Georgia for more than 50 years. Toward the end of his career he and his wife bought a house up on a hill nears Waynesville where they spent much of year. Sam found that he could work from home there. Over time they began making trips to Asheville where they discovered OLLI, enrolled in some classes, and over time, decided to relocate to Asheville when Sam decided to completely retire.

Sam's committee held a series of focus group meetings where they gained input from OLLI members. The report they sent to the university included suggestions for future collaboration including efforts to create more diversity university wide, to promote intergeneration learning experiences, to develop a mentoring program for international students by OLLI members and to explore distance learning programs.

Another suggestion was to establish a human library of the experiences and expertise of OLLI members that could be shared with the university and greater Asheville community. That initiative, called Gray Matters, began recently when several OLLI members were filmed telling their life stories.

Sam's committee was recently charged by the Chancellor with exploring ways OLLI might develop more space, including expanding the number of classrooms, parking facilities, and social gathering areas and perhaps creating athletic facilities. According to Sam, OLLI's options include moving to a new building, staying where we are while expanding our facilities here or consider using off-campus facilities such as the Asheville Art Museum and River Arts District, among others.

Sam seems happy with OLLI's response to the university's challenge and hopes that both the university and OLLI's Steering Committee will begin a serious effort to develop the committee's initiatives.