



Science Pub through the years. Photos by Joan Eaton, Lyndsay Harkins, Sarah Jenness, M. Plouffe, Whit Smith, and Nina Tasi.

Science Pub: 10 Years and Counting

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Since the Fall of 2016, sold-out crowds have gathered at Galligan's Pub to enjoy each other and a favorite beverage and learn about science! To date, AIL has hosted:

- Thirty-one Science Pub events (including one pandemic Zoom session).
- Thirty-one scientist presenters (plus a team of Mt. Sunapee snowmakers!).
- Presentation topics ranging from anthropology to rising oceans, astronomy to gender fluidity, robots to epidemics, and so much more.

It all started with Brenda Watts.

Brenda, a former AIL member and founder of AIL's Science Pub, is not a scientist but has always valued the sciences. Because she believes it is vital for the general public to understand more about science, she often becomes frustrated when she hears presentations about science that use terminology that limits broad understanding. "If you want the public to understand, you must speak the language of the public. There should be no 'Tower of Science.'"

She is not alone in her concerns about ineffective communication of science to the lay public. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, a growing nationwide interest in bringing science to the public led to the emergence of "science cafes" across the country. This popular trend aligned with Brenda's interests, and she wanted to know more. She visited websites to learn about the programs nationwide and attended science cafes held in Norwich and Lebanon, where she spoke with attendees and organizers. What she learned reinforced her belief that AIL and Colby-Sawyer should have their own science café – or pub, actually.

Brenda sold the idea to the AIL Board. Then she met with the managers of Galligan's Pub, explained how science cafes support scientific learning in a casual and friendly environment, and convinced them to agree to host a series of four monthly Science Pub events in the fall of 2016. The events would be open to the public as well as CSC students, faculty and staff. While AIL membership was not a requirement, reservations were necessary due to the limited seating capacity.

Brenda's committee helped her develop the program structure and procedures, as well as plan programs for the series. The committee recruited scientists from the Upper Valley and local institutions, including colleges, private industry, and nonprofits, to make Science Pub presentations. Brenda recalls, "There was a wealth of resources in the Upper Valley. It was not difficult to recruit presenters, even though we were asking them to donate their time and expertise. No one we spoke to was reluctant to participate – they all liked to talk about their work. We explained the requirements: 1. Don't dumb down the talk, but be certain to present the subject in lay terms; 2. Limit the presentation to 30 minutes to allow plenty of time for a lively Q&A session."

In addition to helping to recruit speakers and plan events, com-

mittee members welcomed and checked in Science Pub attendees. Brenda served as the Science Pub Moderator, introducing the presenters and facilitating the Q&A sessions.

The popularity of the fall 2016 series (sold out!) established Science Pub as a staple of AIL's fall learning line-up.

Brenda's association with Science Pub ended in 2022 when she and her husband moved away from Grantham, N.H. Recently, when asked to share her memories of the early years of Science Pub for this article, she was delighted to hear that Science Pub is still thriving. "I'm very happy that Science Pub is still popular because it is so important for the public to understand what is happening in the sciences. I send my thanks to the many people who assisted in establishing and continuing Science Pub."

After Brenda's departure, Science Pub continued to thrive under Ginger Milord's leadership. Ginger, a long-time AIL member, study leader, and board member, hosted popular Science Pub seasons before the 2020 pandemic suddenly made in-person gatherings potentially unsafe. No one at AIL wanted to cancel a Science Pub season altogether, so, in collaboration with AIL Board President Mary Doyle and the AIL Curriculum Committee, Ginger planned one event for fall 2020 and offered it via Zoom. It was a hit! Lockdown-weary Science Pub enthusiasts were delighted to "gather" virtually to enjoy an evening of learning and entertainment.

Strong Science Pub leadership continues today with June Fichter, former Executive Director of the Lake Sunapee Protective Association, an AIL board member, study leader, and long-time AIL member.

June's enthusiasm for public instruction in the sciences is evident when she describes the value of Science Pub. "Today, science and knowledge of ourselves, our world, and our universe are expanding tremendously. AIL's Science Pub is an opportunity for people to see what is behind the science. Presenters, who are experts in their fields, offer insights into the natural world and its inner workings. In the comfortable pub atmosphere, attendees are encouraged to ask questions. And they do!"

Echoing Brenda's observation that presenters enjoy speaking to Science Pub groups, June said, "I have been a presenter. It is very satisfying when I see the 'ah-ha' moment in the audience's faces. [As Science Pub Moderator] I meet new science presenters of many stripes. A common feature of all presenters is an incurable enthusiasm for their work and for sharing their discoveries."

June sums up the enduring value and popularity of Science Pub events in one sentence: "Science Pub is an easy way to expand one's knowledge and to understand better all the intense research and work that goes on around us - while having a beer or a glass of wine!"