



Newsletter June 2021

Thank you to the ELLA Board, Committees, all volunteers, instructors, and you, our members, for successful Winter and Spring 2021 Sessions.

Our Newsletter Features:

- President Gertie Dean's message
- Volunteer profile on Dennis Foth
- ELLA's technology evolution – a year in review
- Winter Session feedback

President's Message

We are almost at the end of our ELLA on-line Spring Session. To have 857 ELLA members taking courses and to realize that 54 on-line courses could be offered under the COVID concerns is astonishing and my thanks goes to all members who felt enough connection to ELLA to take advantage of these offerings.

This is the time of year when we say farewell to the Board members who have reached the end of their terms: *Shirley Forrest* and *Diane Mirth*.

- Shirley was the President of ELLA for two years (typically a one-year term) and as well spearheaded the team which helped create our new ELLA website. This dedication to our Association goes above and beyond what is usually asked of a volunteer member of a Board. Our sincere thanks to Shirley for all she has contributed.
- Diane Mirth served as our Program Implementation Chair for three years. The first of these was when we were face to face at the University. Program Implementation makes certain that classrooms and equipment are scheduled and organized for our courses and

noon hour presentations. These last two years have required a steep learning curve for Diane and her committee, but they rose to the challenge and made it all seem effortless. Thank you so much Diane.

- *Linda Mattern*, ELLA's secretary this year, is leaving Edmonton and therefore will also leave the Board of ELLA. Linda approached the job with great good humour and enthusiasm. The entire board benefited from her organizational skills. Certainly, she made the President's job so much easier. I miss her already.

Thank you to all who volunteered on committees this year. Thank you to the Facilitators, to everyone who took our courses and took the time to complete the surveys. Thanks as well to our Lecturers and Noon Hour Presenters and of course to the entire ELLA Board. What a great year it's been.

Gertie Dean
President

ELLA Member Profile: Dennis Foth, 20+ year Volunteer

In celebration of ELLA's 20-year anniversary we offer this feature on long-term volunteer *Dennis Foth*, pictured below with his wife *Marj*, who also volunteers with ELLA.



Dennis has been involved with ELLA since it was formed in 2001. He has seen ELLA form, grow and mature from a number of angles – as the academic

liaison linking ELLA with the Faculty of Extension, as an ELLA committee member and as an ELLA learner.

Dennis came to Edmonton in 1985 as the Dean of the Faculty of Extension. An experimental psychologist focusing on learning and memory, Dennis' academic interest evolved to that of the older adult learner. This led to Dennis working with the first group of volunteers to form ELLA. For approximately 25 years, the 'Spring Program for Older Adults' had been run by the Faculty of Extension but with cutbacks, the last Spring Program for Older Adults was going to be in 2001. Dennis felt that the learning opportunities should continue, knew that other universities were struggling to continue to provide programming for older adult learners and knew that successful programs had evolved when members took charge. Dennis sat down with a small group of volunteers to discuss continuing the program through the formation of a non-profit organization. He continued to work closely with the newly formed Edmonton Lifelong Learners Association (ELLA) to negotiate the first contract with the university. As Dennis stated, "With good will on both sides, it happened."

Dennis continued to serve as the academic liaison between the university and ELLA until his retirement in 2009. During that time, he supported the program committee, helped negotiate contracts with the university and vetted instructors. In fall 2020, the university again appointed Dennis as academic liaison to ELLA. ELLA periodically gets approached to participate in **(to)** research on older adult learners and Dennis has helped with the research protocols required by the University, as these requests occur.

Since retiring Dennis has become a member of ELLA and served on the Advisory Committee to the Board (3-4 years), which became the Board Recruitment and Development Committee (ongoing role). This committee identifies courses and webinars that develop board member skills as well as the recruitment of new board members.

Looking back at his accomplishments, Dennis is most proud of:

- working with the group of volunteers to get ELLA established as a *sustainable* non-profit organization
- setting up an endowment fund for older adult learners. (Back when Dennis was Dean of Extension, there was a provincial grant to help support the Spring Program for Older Adults. This fund dried up in the Klein years, so Dennis used remaining dollars from an adult learning grant along with some fundraised dollars to start the Endowment for Older Adults. Over the years, ELLA has applied to the endowment for student bursaries and office equipment. Recently the fund has been accessed to assist with the development of the new ELLA website.)

When asked what kind of advice Dennis would offer to a new ELLA volunteer, he stated: "Volunteer for something you are going to really enjoy and learn something from. Find a match with what you would like to learn and your skill set. Most of what you do with ELLA is people related; enjoy the social aspect. Have an appreciation of other volunteers, as they are all doing the best they can. Don't overdo it; know when to say 'no'."

Dennis has been a regular ELLA Spring Session attendee since 2010. He was impressed with the quick transition to Zoom technology and on-line registration for Spring 2020 classes when Covid restrictions occurred. However, like other ELLA members, Dennis is looking forward to the time we can learn together in person again. I for one, can hardly wait to meet Dennis and his wife Marj in person. Dennis, thank you for all you have done, and continue to do, for ELLA!

A Year in ELLA's Technology Journey



The past year has been full of changes and technology in ELLA's world has been no different. Our computer system had been lagging behind our needs for a while and was in a constant state of 'requiring fixes'. Our volunteers were becoming expert fixers but a constant cycle of fixes upon fixes had to end. The 'tipping point' came in June 2020 with the decision to unbundle ELLA courses. The existing system simply could not handle registration, payment and refunds.

This decision created a whirlwind of activity for the following six months. The work began with the hiring of *Focus Communications* to develop a system which could handle the organization's requirements. With a deadline of December 1, 2020, ELLA volunteers working with *Focus Communications* to put the project into top gear. System processes were engineered and setup to allow our administrative procedures to operate smoothly. One of the onerous jobs was 'cleaning up the database'. The amount of data in the system had become a problem and needed a sweep and processes to make it easier to navigate.

Fall 2020 became a time of testing systems and revisions. December 1st was looming; would the system be ready? The tension rose until November 30th, the eve of launch, when it exploded with a question of passwords. "We need those old passwords?" someone exclaimed. After the panic subsided and a frantic search, the required passwords were located and miraculously the website was launched. ELLA was ready for selling memberships and class registration for the first Winter Session with on-line courses. Implementation has not been totally smooth but with the use of a workflow project with increased flexibility in our system, the administrative procedures have allowed ELLA to move ahead with the successful transforming of classes to the on-line format and begin to move in the world of Google Suite.

None of this would have been possible without our volunteers. The IT project was led by *Shirley Forrest*, Past President and chair of the IT Committee until January 2021. The members of the IT committee *Shirley Zylstra*, *Jimm Valentinsen*, *Linda Riopelle*, *Jean Posyniak* and *Alfred Falk*

worked full out in implementing, testing and revising the operational and administrative procedures. *Tamara Baltzan*, chair of the Marketing Committee and *Diane Mirth*, chair of the Program Implementation Committee were also instrumental in the implementation of the project. These exceptional volunteers also worked on a Workflow Project to allow for efficient flow of operations which was translated visually into a working document to guide our work by *Linda Mattern*, Board Secretary.

The IT and Administration Committees worked seamlessly to implement the new system and ensure the smooth running of procedures. Administration Committee members are *Joyce Madsen*, chair; *Marj Foth*, *Michele Fortin*, *Sandra Henderson*, *Janice Friesen*, *Donna Reddekopp*, *Ed Posyniak*, *Jean Posyniak*, *Dorothy Humphrey*, *Ruth Vander Woude* and *Sheila Sirdar*.

On behalf of all ELLA members, a big, huge, gigantic **Thank you** for a fantastic job!



What we learned from the Winter Session surveys

Following the cancellation of the 2020 Spring in-person session due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, ELLA responded by offering a pilot of ten on-line courses. Based on the lessons learned, we were able to fully launch the 2021 Winter Session (from 4 January to 14 April 2021) on-line. This followed the launch of the new ELLA website earlier in December 2020.

ELLA members, 836 strong, received an email 12 April, 2021 requesting feedback regarding ELLA's

new website, course offerings and registration process. The message included a link to a SurveyMonkey on-line evaluation instrument.

There were 350 members who completed the 10-question survey, a 42% response rate. The survey was structured to allow two members with the same IP address to complete the survey.

There was an abundance of frank and helpful comments regarding the glitches experienced with the initial course registration process and our collective learning of how to work with Zoom!

Membership

- 72% - renewing members
- 7% - previous members (not a member 2019-2020, but a member in previous years)
- 21% - first time members

How did you learn about the 2021 ELLA Winter Session?

- 56% - through ELLA newsletters or emails
- 20% - from the ELLA website
- Remainder through a friend or a promotional item (radio, TV, newspaper or Facebook)

Are you satisfied with individual on-line course pricing?

- Yes - 95%
- No - 5%

Demographic – our age group

- 69% - 66 to 81 years young
- 5% - over 82 years
- 26% - 50 to 65 years

Is there another ELLA member in your household?

- Yes – 15%
- No – 85%

Course evaluation transitioned along with the delivery of ELLA courses this winter. We moved from the completion of the ‘yellow half sheet’ evaluation distributed in class from the Course Facilitator to on-line surveys. Starting with the 2021 Winter Session the course evaluation survey

was uploaded to participants’ ‘Your Courses’ page in the ‘There are Available Surveys!’ section. Participants were able to access the survey from the second last class day until it closed seven days after the course ended.

- There were 936 registrations for 34 on-line courses
- Of those registered, 593 members completed the evaluation survey (response rate of 64%)
- 95% of course participants, instructors and on-line course facilitators rated Winter Session as good or very good experience

How many courses did you take?

- 1 course – 28%
- 2 to 3 courses – 37%
- 4 or more courses - nearly 7%

Many thanks for taking the opportunity to include your excellent suggestions for future courses and Noon Hour Presentations. This greatly assists the Program Development Committee planning upcoming sessions.



Program Development Committee – Evaluation

Enjoy the summer and look for more information on Fall Session 2021 in the future!

