

Retirement

Elderhostels, courses invigorate older minds

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

Robert R. Menendes, who retired as a professor of French at Nazareth College in Rochester in 1984, still teaches French to some students there.

"If it keeps going this way, I will die in my classroom surrounded by my students," said Menendes, a native of Paris. "And, by the way, that wouldn't be so bad."

That wouldn't be so bad because Menendes, 76, teaches students who, like himself, are retired. They go to college through Nazareth's Center for Lifelong Learning, which targets students ages 55 and over who want to refresh their minds and invigorate their intellects.

The CLL began in 1981, and offers academic and cultural programs, which typically cost \$40 in tuition. Nazareth's coordinator for non-credit programs, Dolores A. Johnson, said classes meet once a week, for six to eight weeks, and involve no tests or grades. Some courses have outside assignments in reading or writing, she added.

Menendes teaches French to eight-12 senior citizens for six to eight weeks at a time per semester through the CLL.

"I keep telling my co-workers that the best reward at the end of a teaching career is to teach a class like this," he said. "These people come not because they have to, but because they want to. Homework is optional, but they always do it."

Seniors who pursue higher education in their retirement years echoed many of his remarks. Instead of fading away in their twilight years, these seniors see retirement as a chance to shine again intellectually. They take courses for which they didn't have the time when they were working and raising families, such seniors said.

One of Menendes' students, Marion Carey, retired from teaching French to high school and adult students in New Jersey in the 1970s. She moved to Webster more than a decade ago, and a few years ago, she learned of the Center for Lifelong Learning. She decided to brush up on her French by taking courses every semester, she said.

"It's been wonderful for me," Carey said. "It keeps my mind active and keeps my French up."

Johnson said students like Carey are typical of the kinds of seniors who go to college after they retire.



Marion Carey, a retired teacher, now spends some of her time enriching her mind through classes offered at Nazareth College.

"First, they're excited about the topic," she said. "Secondly, they come out because they like to socialize."

And, sometimes, as in the case of Penfield's Bonnie D. Deisenroth, classes through the CLL mark the first time a student has gone to college.

Deisenroth said she couldn't afford to go to college when she graduated from high school in the 1940s. But she's a woman on campus now at Nazareth where she studied Scripture and creative writing through the CLL.

"You know, as you get older, you kind of get into a rut," Deisenroth said. "I like to keep my mind active, and I find that these courses energize it."

Seniors looking to keep their minds active might also consider an "Elderhostel" program, several of which are available in the Diocese of Rochester at such sites as Nazareth College and Notre Dame Retreat House in Canandaigua.

Elderhostels started in New England in 1975, according to Daniel Dowd, a private not-for-profit organization based at LeMoyné College in Syracuse.

In a phone interview with the *Catholic Courier*, Dowd said "Elderhostel" is a term that combines elder with hostel, the name of hospitality houses that generally gear themselves to young people touring Europe.

Elderhostels are intensive educational experiences, often combined with sightseeing tours, that last between one and four weeks, he said. More than 323,000 people from 60 countries have participated in Elderhostels at 1,900 sites throughout

the world, he said.

"It's kind of like sightseeing for the mind," Dowd said. "It's a marvelous way to travel if you're alone."

He noted that the average Elderhostel consists of 20 to 40 people pursuing a common intellectual goal, such as touring the art museums of a European city. But Elderhostels can also take place close to home, Dowd

and other experts said.

Pat Albrecht, associate director of Notre Dame Retreat House in Canandaigua, said the Elderhostel program there usually emphasizes religious and spiritual topics. Participants stay at the retreat house for five to six days, she said. She noted that this July, Notre Dame will offer Elderhostels on the books of Genesis and Exodus; the Psalms; and the Romantic period of music.

Participants are usually enthusiastic about the subject being treated in an Elderhostel, Albrecht said, but they also have other reasons for coming.

"Often, they'll couple the elderhostel with a trip to see a family member," she said.

Nazareth College will offer Elderhostels this summer on Italian opera, and on Italy and Ireland, Johnson said. Participants stay in the college's dormitories. Both she and Albrecht pointed out that Elderhostels offer an interesting mix of intellectual stimulation along with socialization through dinners and get-togethers held during the week, a point Dowd highlighted.

"Studying there is half the fun," he said. "The other half is in the people you meet."

EDITORS' NOTE: For information on Nazareth College's Center for Lifelong Learning and its Elderhostel program, call Dolores A. Johnson at 716/389-2055.

For information on Elderhostels offered by Notre Dame Retreat House in Canandaigua, call Pat Albrecht at 716/394-5700.

For general information on Elderhostels, call Daniel Dowd at 315/445-4166.

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