

Forever Learning

By Janice Ford-Spencer

Across North America, seniors are engaging in educational pursuits grand and modest, formal and informal, in huge numbers.

Whether it's learning to make pottery at a local seniors centre, taking art lessons at a nursing home or finishing up a history degree at a university, seniors are hitting classrooms and craft studios with gusto. South of the border, a recent report from Unlimited Construction Inc. of Virginia indicated that some 100 university campuses will soon be hosting retirement communities that will accommodate senior residents interested in lifelong learning. Another U.S. survey of 233 adults aged 55-75 found that living near a campus was preferred by 58 per cent. Fully 62 per cent of those respondents, it was reported at seniorliving.about.com, said they were "very interested" in lifelong learning, which included taking courses with traditional university students.

Attending classes keeps the mind sharp, improves memory, builds confidence and even helps to save money as senior students learn to "do it themselves."

And they might even discover heretofore unknown talents.

Consider long-term care resident Ella McCrea. No one was more astonished than McCrea when she picked up a paintbrush at a weekly painting class and created a beautiful work of art. Just shy of 90, she says, "It surprised my three children I think as much as it surprised me!"

Born in Essex, Ont., McCrea worked as a nurse, lived a busy and fulfilling married life, and now feels it is her opportunity to bloom. "With nursing and taking care of my kids there was no time for me," she explained. "My world is here now. I am well taken care of and so happy that I have the time to paint."

McCrea says she feels an enormous sense of accomplishment in discovering this untapped talent. "I give my paintings to my children and grandchildren first, but I have the rest in my room. I am proud of them and personally enjoy them."

Now, she can't wait for her weekly classes. "When Saturday morning comes, I am up and ready to go!"

This article originally appeared in the August 2009 issue of Forever Young Newspaper