

## In Recognition of the Wisdom and Dedication of OLLI at UVA's Principal Founder



It is with a heavy heart that I announce the passing of Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) at UVA's principal founder, Jim McGrath, on October 23, 2020. Jim was the instrumental force in starting OLLI, originally named the Jefferson Lifelong Learning Institute (JILL), after he came to Virginia for retirement. According to sources, Jim had to have something to do to keep him busy, so he decided to champion lifelong learning.

At that time, he visited the College of William and Mary's initial lifelong learning center in Williamsburg to understand their structure. From there, Jim spearheaded getting OLLI off the ground in Charlottesville. He conferred with Leigh Middleditch, OLLI's co-founder and a well-connected university stalwart. In speaking to Leigh about Jim's impact on spearheading OLLI, he states,

**“Jim successfully pursued the Osher Foundation on the west coast for funding; he was able to convince our leadership to present programs of value, particularly to seniors.”**

A brief [article](#) from when JILL became OLLI was featured in *UVA Magazine* and ironically cites the introduction of online courses in the summer of 2008. Jim was certainly ahead of his time in more ways than one. Perhaps the [most poignant article](#) about Jim was written in *The Daily Progress* in 2017 as a nomination to the “Distinguished Dozen” from past-President, Joan Kammire. Joan states,

**“Jim was amazing; the way he persevered through and beyond significant health issues, never giving up his stewardship of OLLI.”**

Joan became involved with OLLI in 2003 when Audrey Gottlieb taught her how to be a class assistant. Audrey is also featured in this edition of *The Insider* for her many

contributions to the start and growth of OLLI through the years. Eventually, Jim asked Joan to direct OLLI and she later become President following Jim. Joan also shared with me a lovely biography of Jim, written for the 2011 *Osher Institutes National Conference* which they attended together that year,

**"Jim McGrath is the principle founder of OLLI at UVA and has been its president for 10 years. He received an undergraduate degree in economics from UVa and an MBA from George Washington University. Jim worked for several firms in information technology, management and planning. He retired from Siecor Corporation as Senior Vice President in 1996. Jim has always been interested in keeping active and continuing his education. He was inspired to create a lifelong learning program after visiting a similar program and realizing the benefits of learning with others who have a breadth of life experiences, not to mention the ease of attending day time classes of brief duration that were easily accessible."**

As noted in same *The Daily Progress* [article](#) from 2017, if you asked Jim what possessed him to undertake the project, he remained humble, thinking only of how he could give back to the community. "I just thought I could make a contribution," he said. And Jim sure did because without his direction, OLLI at UVA would not be here today. According to Beth Barber, OLLI's past Executive Director,

**"Jim was operationally very hands-on. He, along with the many volunteers he recruited, built the solid foundation and relationship with UVA that is so important still today. In my interactions with Jim, I found him to be committed to his vision, passionate, and kind. His networking was just imperative. Without his energy and passion, we just wouldn't even be here."**

There simply are not enough words to describe Jim's contribution to OLLI; we are considering the proper way to acknowledge him in a long-term. On behalf of the OLLI staff, Board of Directors, and members, we will miss Jim and remain thankful for all that he has left for us as we continue the path forward.

In gratitude,

*Leslie E. Pont*

OLLI Executive Director