

Introduction

The **Association of Lifelong Learners at Alpena Community College**, a 501(c) 3 nonprofit organization, has been enriching the lives of people in Northeast Michigan for nearly twenty-four years by emulating their name ... providing and promoting life-long learning. The organization has had a lasting impact on this amazing community!

Through non-credit classes, presentations, adventures and outings, the Lifelong Learners (also known as A.L.L. or ALL at ACC) provide learning experiences for all ages. Talk about continuous improvement -- Lifelong Learners have gone from initially offering twenty or thirty programs a year to the present curriculum of over 175 programs annually! Many programs are open to the entire community at no charge.

Initially the organization was founded in 1998 for people fifty years of age or older; however, the members are adaptable and skilled at change! They realized that young people in today's culture often miss out on the advantages of interacting with older people like they used to in days gone by. Several years ago, A.L.L. adapted to fill this need and is now open to members of all ages and intergenerational activities are enthusiastically promoted. Evening and some weekend classes have been added so that young working people are able to attend. The Association avidly promotes the love of lifelong learning across age boundaries.

So, what is this "lifelong learning"? It can take a multitude of forms; but let us name a few: Members and guests may take a tour of Nowicki's Sausage (watching a top-grade, Alpena-made food being produced.) Or perhaps it is a lecture on philosophy by the President of ACC. It may be a presentation by a local doctor dealing with medical questions, a lesson on how to bake the best apple pie, a forum on election choices, a discussion about women in the Bible, a canoe trip down the AuSable River or a hike to the sink holes. Where else can you learn about local fishing practices and impressions of China, all in the same week? No other group covers as many diverse topics or solves the what-to-do-in-Alpena question as consistently. Each semester explores exciting topics and takes Alpena area residents on delicious adventures, both physical and intellectual.

The Association of Lifelong Learners is so optimistic about Alpena that they spearheaded a movement to have Alpena designated as a "Community for a Lifetime." Together with community leaders, A.L.L. members pulled together an application showing Alpena's top notch health care, transportation, safety, housing, recreation and social activities. This effort resulted in the State of Michigan issuing a "Community for a Lifetime" award to the Alpena area. In creative advertising, A.L.L. proudly makes a claim of being "The Hottest Group in the Coolest City." Yes! A.L.L. is optimistic.

Collaboration is of utmost concern to the Association of Lifelong Learners. A.L.L. brings people into Alpena who might not otherwise travel here and 'takes Alpena' to areas where Alpena might not otherwise receive recognition. Through programs and presentations, A.L.L. members and guests may go to businesses for the first time. A few examples of this are an A.L.L. tour and lecture at the Coast Guard Station, a trip to a lavender farm in Boyne City, a visit to Alpena's Water Treatment Plant or a tour of Cadillac Plastics in Rogers City. In obtaining Presenters, A.L.L. sometimes brings people to Alpena for the first time. (Examples of this would be the female Mt. Everest mountain climber who lectured about health and fitness for people of all ages or the internationally known University of Michigan musicologist who lectured about Gershwin.)

Lifelong Learners are known for their collaboration with local entities. Some examples of collaboration are holding programs at a wide variety of venues such as at Myers' Clothing, Besser Museum or Turning Brook; presenting concerts and theatre events, and volunteering with community service agencies.

Some members meet weekly to play dominoes, Bridge and volleyball. Recent additions to this 'special interest' type of programming include monthly meetings: the "Walkabouts" who hike together; the "Moveable Feast", an opportunity to dine with friends at varying local restaurants; "Financial Forum", members who enjoy discussing money issues; and "Focus on Fun" Camera Club.

In bringing residents of all ages together to play, to learn, to serve, members of the Association of Lifelong Learners at Alpena Community College (ALL at ACC) are agents of change. ALL's members, acting as individuals and together as a strong volunteer organization, have served this community for well over a decade and continue to provide experiences that are essential for living an enriched life in Alpena.