

SILL's Return Debut to Plymouth Harbor

After nearly 30 years, Sarasota Institute of Lifetime Learning (SILL) will be making its auspicious return debut to the original site of its initial educational offerings, with one modern day exception. It will be presented in “simulcast” at Pilgrim Hall Theater in January through March of 2009, where Plymouth Harbor residents will be able to participate through a live broadcast from Players Theatre.

“This is an exciting new pilot program,” stated Gordon Okawa, Director of Community Relations, “that culminated out of a mutual desire for both organizations to collaborate on a specific need that SILL brought to our attention.”



In a meeting hosted by Plymouth Harbor in early February of this year, representatives from SILL met with Harry Hobson, President/CEO, Garry Jackson, Vice-President/CFO, and Gordon Okawa, Director of Community Relations, along with Dr. Peggy Bates, resident and board member of SILL, to discuss and brainstorm ideas on how to help SILL expand access to their successful international lecture series. The representatives from SILL explained that their popular Thursday sessions, currently held at Players Theatre, had continually sold out the 525 seat venue for the past three years with an invariable demand for more tickets. The SILL organization began to search for a local Sarasota venue about three years ago that could ideally accommodate another 200+ customers but none could be found that would fit both the schedule and the size needed.

“One of the goals of the meeting was to come to the table with a ‘blank’ sheet of paper and brainstorm a variety of possibilities in coming up with creative alternatives,” explained Harry Hobson. It was during this process that the group began discussing the possibility of getting beyond the “bricks-and-mortar” challenge and taking advantage of modern technology to provide additional access to SILL’s quality programming. The SILL board enthusiastically agreed to explore over the ensuing months the concept of simulcasting their programming to Plymouth Harbor. Once Players Theatre expressed their support of the idea, the next step was to search for the technology to make it possible. Access Sarasota (cable channel 19) was then identified to be the provider of this service.

While the concept of simulcasting is not new—the technology has existed since the early 1970s—the use of transmitting audio and video in real time to remote locales has significantly expanded over the last 10 to 15 years with the advent and enhancement of digital technology, compact satellite dishes and the internet and the need for more efficient communications.

“This exciting new programming opportunity would not have been possible without the efforts and support of Plymouth Harbor resident, Dr. Peggy Bates,” commended Harry. “Dr. Bates’ vision and spirit of collaboration brought Plymouth Harbor and SILL together again through this exciting new media. How fitting that her efforts and our strategic initiatives have drawn SILL back full circle to Plymouth Harbor, where it all began in 1972.”

Dr. Evelyn Duvall, an early Plymouth Harbor resident, founded the Sarasota Institute of Lifetime Learning (SILL) in 1972, after she attended the first White House Conference on Aging. She came back enthused with the idea that older minds need exercise as much as, or more than, their bodies. She established her fledgling organization under the guidance of the National Institute of Lifetime Learning and partnered with the National Retired Teachers Association and American Association of Retired Persons. Early offerings focused on discussion groups around Sarasota, each led by a moderator, some on topics mostly of interest to retirees.

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As the idea took hold, more people were attracted, and the program changed from the intimacy of a small gathering to the formality of a large audience. In 1978, the program established its current season of January through March. Eight seminars, usually six sessions apiece, were offered at three Sarasota locations: Plymouth Harbor, Unity Center of Sarasota and the 1st United Methodist Church. Attendance at SILL’s regular Thursday lecture series is currently a sellout at the 525 seat Players Theatre, where SILL has held lectures since 2001.

We are proud and excited to have SILL back at Plymouth Harbor to offer our residents yet another quality program utilizing the most current technology.

Tickets are on sale to residents through November 21, 2008 in the Marketing and Sales office. For more information please call Extension 512.