



# Collegium News

Volume 12 Issue 1

Newsletter of the Cannon Valley Elder Collegium  
*"A Questing Mind Never Retires"*

October 2008

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Kathy Mellstrom  
Writer

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Publications Layout

## The Aging Brain

by Kathy Mellstrom

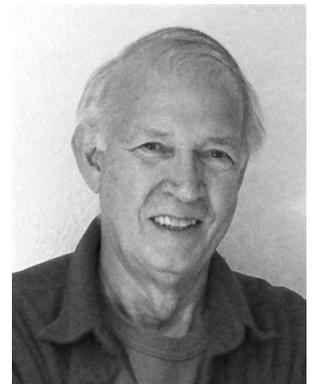
In the early years of the twenty-first century, a new spotlight has caught in its beam a subject important to the ever increasing numbers of people fortunate enough to live well past middle age: the quality of what was once considered "the declining years" and how it might be maximized. Neurologists and psychologists have turned their attention to this issue, resulting in several studies that seek to pinpoint the changes, physical, mental and psychological, that take place as the brain ages along with the rest of the body. Dementia due to Alzheimer's Disease is one of the top concerns facing people in later life, and finding ways to avoid the symptoms is one of the missions of those who do this research.

One unique study that has shed light on this complex issue is the "Nun Study," designed and directed by epidemiologist David Snowdon over several years, beginning in 1986. Conducting tests of mental acuity and competence on a population of nuns over many years and then subjecting their brains to detailed autopsy examination focused on physical evidence of Alzheimer's yielded some striking results. Perhaps the most surprising was that the degree of damage, ranked by set criteria from Stages I to VI, did not necessarily correspond to the level of dementia recorded by those who assessed the subjects in life. Some brains ranked in early stages belonged to individuals who had declined markedly, and even more amazing, some ranked at the latest stages came from women who were considered sharp and competent up to the last days of very old age.

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## Introducing Jon Rondestvedt

Jon has been a Northfield resident for only four years now, but he is not a newcomer. His grandfather, both parents and their siblings, he and his wife, Jeanette, and three of their four children all graduated from St. Olaf. Thus, since 1886, Northfield has been a center of learning for this family. Jon holds an M.A. from the University of Minnesota as well as additional advanced credits from the U of M, and as an NEH scholar from Tufts in Boston, and Cornell in Ithaca. He taught English and the humanites in Robbinsdale, MN for thirty-four years. He retired to build his own lake home near Park Rapids, where he served on the township board, chaired the library board, and helped found the Headwaters Center for Lifelong Learning, which shares with CVEC the commitment to quality programming. As your newly-elected Board Chair sporting a size fourteen shoe, he is keenly aware that following Vern Faillettaz's footsteps will be a challenge. Nevertheless, in his passionate commitment to lifelong learning, Jon eagerly looks forward to serving CVEC and you, its members.



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## 2009 Winter Term--Class Schedule

January 5 - February 27, 2009

**Class Title****Instructor**

**The Green Connections: Is Nature Really Important to Our Lives?**  
Monday 9:30 - 11:30 am

**Nalani McCutcheon**  
Kildahl Park Pointe

**An Everyday Story?**  
Monday 1:30 - 3:30 pm

**Torild Homstad**  
Kildahl Park Pointe

**France – For the Armchair Traveler**  
Tuesday 9:30 - 11:30 am

**Hartley Clark**  
Village on the Cannon

**More Hillerman, Leaphorn, Chee, and the Great Southwest**  
Tuesday 1:30 - 3:30 pm

**Mary Flaten**  
Three Links-Park Ridge Apt  
Dining Room

**Economics for the Modern Person**  
Wednesday 9:30 - 11:30 am

**Bill Carlson**  
Village on the Cannon

**Global Cinema**  
Wednesday 1:30 - 3:30 pm

**J. Eric Nelson**  
Northfield Retirement Community  
Theatre & Fireside Room

**The Scientific Revolution: Does the Earth Really Move?**  
Thursday 9:30 - 11:30 am

**Richard Noer**  
Northfield Senior Center

**The Ethics of Virtue (and Vice)**  
Thursday 1:30 -- 3:30 pm

**Perry Mason**  
Northfield Retirement Community  
Fireside Room

**Improving Your Vision with Your Camera**  
Thursday 4:00 - 6:00 pm

**Fred Gonnerman**  
Northfield Senior Center

**Great Decisions – New Issues 2009**  
Thursday 6:30 - 8:30 pm

**Robert Flaten**  
Northfield Senior Center-Rm 106

**Patterns and Symmetry**  
Friday 9:30 - 11:30 am

**Judy Cederberg**  
Village on the Cannon

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**NOTE #1:** For a description of the courses, go to the CVEC web page ([www.cvec.org](http://www.cvec.org)).

## Annual Meeting

A capacity crowd filled the chapel of 901 Cannon Valley Drive on May 4 for the 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of Cannon Valley Elder Collegium. Noting that the faculty of the Collegium is a unique and important resource, outgoing Curriculum Committee chair, Vern Failletaz, recognized Don Norris and Hartley Clark for five and George Soule for ten years' teaching for the organization.

Mary Ann Eng introduced the featured speaker, Dick Cantwell, describing from personal experience the enthusiasm about vocal performance he imparts to his classes. Herr Cantwell (as he was known to generations of German students at Carleton College) then demonstrated, delivering the long anticipated sample of his teaching, a mini-lecture on "The Greatest German Lied," complete with hand-outs and audio recording of the song under examination. Many members left the meeting having learned something completely new!

Several of next fall term's instructors presented brief "teaser" previews of their courses. Complete course descriptions are now available on the [www.cvec.org](http://www.cvec.org) web site, along with information about registration procedures. CVEC director Bill Carlson added that there will most likely be two sections of Hartley Clark's course on energy. He also noted that registrations received before the registration date are processed for enrollment in random order – there is no advantage to mailing weeks ahead over just a few days ahead. Classes not filled immediately then continue to be available on a first come, first served basis.

Our director also gave a brief report on the state of the organization, which is, briefly, "strong" (see "From the Director"). Retiring Board members were recognized and a slate of nominees was elected by the assembly. All emerged into the sunny afternoon in touch with the latest at CVEC.

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"If CVEC did not exist, someone would be working to create it," says our director, Bill Carlson. As he mentions in "From the Director" in this issue, that is exactly what happened recently in Winona, another Minnesota college town that has been attracting new retirees for reasons similar to Northfield's.

Fortunately, the Collegium has been organized in such a way that it can handle growth. It grew from a modest start-up funded by grants to a much larger independent operation, without having to compromise its course offerings or undertake major reorganization. As the tasks of running CVEC grew, adjustments were made to share the work among more members, organized by committee.

Looking to the future has been a big part of the organization's success. Each new challenge, whether in funding or in planning courses, has not only been met, but has also inspired strategies for handling upcoming challenges. "We are carefully monitoring the demand for additional classes," explains our director. "Some term we may suddenly find many more students than planned. But we could immediately increase the number of sections for some courses, and we are continually developing a list of possible future courses."

There will certainly be a dramatic increase in the potential student base, but with an effective organizational structure, ongoing re-evaluation, and looking ahead, CVEC's future is ensured -- just as it was in the past.



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**CVEC is a Non-discriminatory Organization**

## **From the Director**

Our 11<sup>th</sup> year has been very successful. We enrolled 474 students and dynamic interaction between students and faculty was strong, as always. About 20% of our students come from outside of Northfield, half of those from Faribault. We are secure financially. We have been blessed by a major gift from an anonymous member, and I thank this member publicly. We also received a Grant from the Minnesota Humanities Center. These gifts have provided us with additional equipment for classroom presentations and will also fund new, innovative projects for the Collegium.

As I continue to learn about other senior education programs I am continually impressed by the unique organization and quality of CVEC. The founders developed a structure that is independent of all other organizations, and one which is run by volunteers but also recognizes the contributions of teachers and administrators through modest honorariums. This independence and the dedication of members is our strength and they enable us to continue our mission. We all grow from and enjoy learning new ideas. Of course we are fortunate to have many local retired educators and also new people who have settled in Northfield. Last year, George Soule and I met with some folks in Winona who were interested in senior learning. This contact grew out of our Shakespeare project. Great Rivers Elder Collegium has now started up in Winona, modeled after CVEC.

The Collegium has now evolved to a point where the original founding leadership has been replaced by new members. Lois Burgoyne and I are now the most senior members of the Board. Lois has a good sense of the history, but I am a "new kid," in the organization only four years. Our new Board Chair Jon Rondestvedt has taught courses but is also relatively new to the Collegium. We believe that the existing structure and our dedicated community will ensure continued strength. But it is also important that new members participate as volunteers, teachers, and students. Involvement is the way we grow new members and leadership that will carry on our outstanding program.



**Bill  
Carlson**

**Bill**

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