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# ~ Collegium News ~

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Volume 8 Issue 2

Newsletter of the Cannon Valley Elder Collegium  
“A Questing Mind Never Retires”

July 2005

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## Greetings from your new Board Chair:

At the May board meeting, Bill Woehrlin stepped down as Chairman of the CVEC Board, and I was elected to replace him. I am very pleased to serve for this coming year, for I have been involved with CVEC since Ron Ronning's first exploratory meetings. Since then, I have taught a course every year but one and have served on the Board for the past three years.

Through all this activity, I have met many members of CVEC—but not all. I hope to make up for this omission over 2005-2006. If any member wants to contact me, stop me in the street or at the grocery store. Or my phone is 645-8285 (please phone before 4 p.m., for I am the cook at our house), and my email address is [gsoule@charter.net](mailto:gsoule@charter.net).

CVEC is in fine shape. We have a superb faculty offering an increasingly varied range of courses. Our finances are solid. Our Administrators are energetic, and their reorganization has made them even more effective. We have a devoted Board.

And, as I know from personal experience, we have wonderful students. Let me urge all of you to take advantage of as many of our course offerings as you can. Our faculty love to teach and you have proved that you love to learn.

Here's to a successful 2005-2006 for CVEC.

--George Soule



### Administration

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Teresa Ballentine  
Associate Director

Lori Stanley  
Operations Director

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Organization

Northfield Retirement  
Community

### Funding

MN Humanities  
Commission

Hoelt Family Foundation

CVEC Members

### Staff

Ray Eng  
Publication Layout

Kathy Mellstrom  
Writer

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## Adult Development and Mental Fitness

Why do you take classes at CVEC? For fun? To learn more about the world you have lived in so many years? To engage in thinking along with other thinking people? Whatever your own reasons, there are more good reasons to continue taking them than most people know.

The 1970s saw a dramatic increase in life expectancy and an associated increase in disabilities related to aging, perhaps the most dreaded being dementia. As the population aged, it became important to learn whether the risk, magnitude and onset of disabilities could be reduced or delayed. Research ensued.

It was discovered that education is a *major factor* in retaining cognitive abilities later in life. Studies of identical twins were especially useful in highlighting the role environment plays. While genetic factors are important (accounting for 50% to 70% of results, depending on the study), education and other intellectual and social stimuli make huge differences in onset and severity of dementia and other degenerative diseases. It seems that similar to the case in children's brain development, optimal environments and activities create actual physical differences in the brains of the mature, maintaining a reserve of mental capacity in those who have developed it and continue to exercise it.

More good news about adult mental development can be summarized by the word “wisdom.” Across time and cultures this has been seen as a quality possessed by elders and usually includes a concept of judgment, especially in the realm of human relationships, and of expert knowledge acquired through long experience. More recent writings have described one element of wisdom as “dialectical thinking,” which continually confronts and then encompasses opposite arguments and thereby progresses. Another is “crystallized knowledge,” the ability to place new information in a much larger context of meaning, as opposed to the “flexible knowledge” of the young which absorbs new facts better but does not fit them into the whole. Both of these elements of wisdom develop only with maturity and experience.

As one purpose of the various studies is to suggest a life plan that will maximize mental powers through later life, here are some positive findings:

- Education helps sustain mental abilities
- A sense of competence and self-esteem (found to be a result of taking classes) improves cognitive function
- Ditto with “complex environments”
- Social support improves mental performance

In addition, physical exercise (not typical Collegium material) can enhance the nervous system, especially memory, and involvement with children is another positive influence (were it not summer, we could all run to volunteer at the elementary schools today). It has also been suggested that learning a foreign language can improve mental function and memory.

A 79-year-old student in one of the studies summarized what is perhaps at the heart of why you take CVEC courses: "I have made many good friends in the classroom and it has kept my brain ticking."

## FALL TERM September 19 – November 11, 2005

### COURSE

Collecting & Recording Oral Histories  
Program Music: From Beethoven to Richard Strauss  
Tragedy and Utopia: Two Responses to Suffering and Evil  
Europe versus the United States  
What are the concerns about stem cells?  
The Early to Mid-Renaissance in Umbria and Tuscany  
An Archaeological Search for Jesus  
Modern Irish Short Story  
Astronomy –An Ageless Science

### INSTRUCTOR

Marie Gery  
Bill Child & Ron Ronning  
Walter Stromseth  
Hartley Clark  
Ross Shoger  
Reidar Dittmann  
Ruth Hansen  
Stan Frear  
Duane Olson

(Complete descriptions of these courses can be found on the web page [www.cvec.org](http://www.cvec.org))

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### CVEC EVENTS

The **Annual Spring CD/Video Sale** on April 1 & 2 provided \$638 for the CVEC. We extend our thanks to Connie Sansome for organizing and running this sale.

The **Fall Meeting of CVEC** will be held on Sunday October 23, 2005 at the United Methodist Church. Note this on your October calendar.

We (Collegium members) are invited to a preview event at the **Village on The Cannon** Thursday, July 7, 3:00 to 5:00 p.m. Wine and hors d'oeuvres will be provided, and guests will be able to see what the Village has to offer, including the new Collegium Classroom where some of CVEC's classes will meet.

May 11, 2005 found the NRC chapel filled with CVEC members gathered around flower-bedecked tables with coffee, cookies and attentive aspect at the Annual Membership Meeting. They heard about changes in administration, honored leaders and volunteers, got previews of some of next year's courses, and were treated to four-part harmony by the North End Boys. The assembly wrapped up with the business meeting, which included encouraging news about attendance and the state of finances, and the election of new board members and Nominating Committee.

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### CVEC CONTACTS

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### Members Meeting

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### Course Expansion

You will notice that in 2005-2006 there are eight or nine courses to choose from each term. This is thanks to an \$8000 grant from the **Hoelt Family Foundation** to expand course offerings. In particular, note the two science courses next fall. They do not require previous study in these areas, they are "for the non-major," designed to impart a greater understanding of our world as science reveals it and to ponder the magnitude and nature of the influence of this knowledge on our lives and thought.