

features



Staff photo by Sharon Clarke

Nell Sonnemann in Spencer dorm room



Staff photo by Sharon Clarke

Elderhostelers in economics class



Staff photo by Robert Anthony

Participants at wine and cheese party

Elderhostel provides education, recreation

By Martha Johnsen

Consider your own retirement. You've had a good education, a challenging career, and now you're content to play pinochle and sit rocking on your front porch. Right?

Wrong, say dozens of elderhostelers, students older than 60, who are visiting the UNC campus throughout June. You may have seen them listening intently in a classroom, standing in line at the Pine Room or just strolling around campus wearing pink buttons and nametags.

"These people don't fit the stereotypes of people being inactive and uninterested in things after retirement," Jennifer Newton, resident coordinator for the elderhostelers, said. The 30-40 member groups stay in Spencer dormitory during their visits.

Elderhostelers, who come from all over the United States, are mobile, well-educated citizens more than 60 years of age, according to an elderhostel brochure.

Chapel Hill is one of 12 institutions in the state offering the Elderhostel experience, the brochure says. Nationwide, the program includes more than 370 colleges and universities in all 50 states. Elderhostel began in 1970 with

five colleges in New England.

Elderhostelers have come to UNC for the intellectual stimulation afforded by courses taught especially for them by UNC professors. In addition, they can vacation with a group of diverse people their own age and become familiar with Chapel Hill's educational and recreational opportunities.

The classroom experience is the heart of the program. At least three courses are offered at each Elderhostel location. At UNC, elderhostelers can choose this week among Chinese History, Through Art, Ecology: Our Leafy Friends and Inflation, Recession and Confusion, said Hugh Huff, UNC campus coordinator for Elderhostel.

Colleges choose courses to give students the special flavor of their area. For example, UNC-Wilmington offers a course in marine biology that includes shark-fishing. At UNC-Asheville, hostelers visit Thomas Wolfe's home as part of a course studying his writings.

Teachers find that the elderhostelers are a special group of students. "This is a very thirsty group," says James Wilde, associate professor of economics at UNC. "They're much more active, and less shy than undergraduates."

"We have our opinions," explains one elderhosteler from Maryland. "And when you get to be our age, you're not afraid to express them."

The opinions and experiences of the Elderhostel group can blend to create a lively classroom atmosphere. No one yawns. No one falls asleep. And professors never need to pull teeth to get a response. After every question, they are answered by a barrage of raised hands and outspoken voices.

Teaching elderhostelers gave a new perspective to one professor. "I have to learn to adjust my experience to theirs," says Wilde. "These people have gone through the Depression. They can tell me things that I don't even know. That really turns the tables of teaching—we're all learning."

Outside of class, the elderhostelers stay busy. They explore the campus, go swimming or golfing, or just get to know one another. "They're very curious and love to sit around and talk," says Newton. "They talk a lot about their coursework and many fast friendships are formed."

Elderhostel members come from a variety of backgrounds. This week's group includes a retired social worker, a dean of business affairs, an army officer, a teacher, a housewife and a woman from the foreign service who speaks five languages. One woman, Marshall Lockhart,

from Tennessee, lived in Spencer dorm 50 years ago when she attended UNC.

"People are usually pretty quiet about their backgrounds," says one elderhosteler. "Often you don't find out about them until the end of the week and then you wish you had more time to talk." As a result, many participants keep in touch long after the week is over.

Elderhostel administrators are enthusiastic about the program. "We're reaching people who put a premium on education—mostly retired white-collar professionals, but there's still a significant number of people involved who never went to college," says Bob Wagoner, regional director for Elderhostel in North Carolina.

Costs are kept to a minimum, \$130 a week for room, meals and instruction, to make the program available to more people.

"I want to keep this going so that when I get to be that age, I'll be able to come back and discuss ideas and have a 'reality check' so to speak," Huff said. "It's exciting for me to work with these people. This group is fun."

Monday night elderhostelers mingled with professors and UNC President William C. Friday at a wine and cheese party. "It's not the age, it's the mind level," said one elderhosteler amid the lively discussions and laughter. "You see, programs like this one make you realize that growing old is not so bad after all."

ISRAEL
LOWEST COST FLIGHTS
 ■ Reliable — Flexible
 ■ Free European Stops
 ■ Buy Now For Summer And Save
 (212) 689-8980
 Outside New York
 TOLL FREE 1-800-223-7676
 The Center For Student Travel
 1140 Broadway, N.Y.C., N.Y. 10001
 "Our 8th Year"

Drive Our Cars
ALMOST FREE
 to most U.S. cities
AUTO DRIVEAWAY
919-272-2153
 520 W. Friendly Ave.
 Greensboro, N.C.

ANNOUNCING THE HOLIDAY DRINKING AND DANCING TO NORTH CAROLINA'S BEST PARTY BAND
ANNOUNCING

RALEIGH WOMEN'S HEALTH ORGANIZATION
ABORTIONS \$176.00
 (ALL Inclusive)
 Pregnancy Tests - Birth Control -
 Problem Pregnancy Counseling
 For Further Information Call 832-0535 or 1-800-221-2568
 917 West Morgan St.
 Raleigh, N.C. 27605

HEY PARDNERS!
OUR BOB ROY COKE IS BACK
 free with purchase of any platter, entree or sandwich
Roy Rogers
 Open Sun.-Thurs. 11:00 a.m. - Fri. & Sat. 11:00 a.m.
 106 Mallette Street • Chapel Hill • 968-9217