

LEARNING COMES

Full “Circle”

Embrace Arts and Science with University Circle’s Lifelong Learning Program

By Sandy Kreisman



New York Times columnist David Pogue discusses technology during an intergenerational program with Laurel Lake residents.

PHOTO COURTESY OF DONNA ANDERSON/LAUREL LAKE

Imagine taking your family to learn about the world-renown Asian collections at The Cleveland Museum of Art. Or having them chat with a curator at The Cleveland Museum of Natural History to discuss trends in the area’s birding community? How about watching a live concert with students from The Cleveland Institute of Music?

Seeing, learning and listening — it happens in real-time each week through University Circle’s cultural offerings throughout Northeast Ohio.

University Circle Inc., (UCI) a development, service and advocacy organization, provides community education for students of all ages by creating unique learning opportunities through online connections to the institutions in Cleveland’s rich and vibrant cultural neighborhood.

The interactive programming allows lively dialogue with experts, educators and students up close and personal from the comfort of local community centers, assisted living facilities and nursing homes.

PROGRAMS FOR ADULTS

University Circle Inc. works closely with community sites to customize programs. Active adults who attend programs at senior community centers typically participate in a monthly videoconference, then go on a guided, follow-up field trip to an exhibit, concert or play.

Videoconferencing technology has been around for 20 years, but as equipment becomes more affordable, streamlined and easier to use, retirement communities have embraced the technology.

In 2001, UCI began developing a sophisticated program for schools and then began to adapt these programs for adult audiences in 2011.

After a successful pilot program with Laurel Lake in Hudson, UCI offered the Senior Connections program regionally.

The Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland Museum of Natural History and Cleveland Institute of Music have videoconferencing studios, and the Western Reserve Historical Society has a shared studio. Hundreds of programs are offered with topics as varied as history, current events, nature and cultural trends. The programs might include a single museum, or some events connect several sites simultaneously.

Partnerships can reach beyond the Circle, with programming from similar national partners, like the National Park Service, the Smithsonian Institution and NASA.

GET CONNECTED

Residents of independent and assisted living communities can enjoy videoconferences on a weekly basis and visit University Circle several times annually for performances, exhibitions or other events.

Last year, UCI curated a series

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Top: Cleveland Institute of Music students perform and answer questions during distance learning programs. Bottom: Dale Hilton teaches about African art from the Cleveland Museum of Art distance learning studios.

on architecture and scheduled videoconferences on Art Deco buildings, Sacred Architecture and sustainable trends in building design. Participants toured architecturally significant sites around the Circle including the Cleveland Cultural Gardens, Lake View Cemetery and the Frank Gehry building at Case Western Reserve University.

Monthly themes have included African-American History, Faces of the Civil War, Traveling the Silk Road and Cleveland's Immigration Story, with a behind-the-scenes tour of the West Side Market. Recommendations for reading materials and websites often accompany videoconferences so participants can delve deeper into subjects.

Participants embrace the technology and enjoy the program variety. UCI education staff regularly meet

and plan with residents and activity directors at sites to determine topic interest, then curate or produce programming to meet those needs.

PROVEN, POSITIVE OUTCOMES

The lifelong learning programs help develop deeper appreciation and understanding for the arts, sciences and humanities, and provide a valuable — and much anticipated — social outlet, too.

Senior Connections programming has been implemented at Laurel Lake in Hudson, Rockynol in Akron, Copeland Oaks in Sebring, Montefiore in Beachwood and at Solon Senior Center. There are plans to expand to other retirement communities and senior community centers in the region, including the Rocky River Senior Center this year.

“Having the opportunity to learn from the experts on-site is beyond the scope of our ability,” says Jill Frankel, Solon Senior Center director. “Using this inclusive technology, we can bring the experts to the seniors. An added bonus is to have the interactivity, enhancing learning in real-time. Coupling this learning with the related field trips enables participants to apply what they have learned and feel that it is relevant in their personal lives and community.”



Sandy Kreisman is Distance Learning Manager for University Circle, Inc. To find out more about bringing Senior Connections to your community, call 216-707-5021, or e-mail skreisman@universitycircle.org.

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