

# Creative

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self-paced training refreshed her understanding of the natural processes of aging and provided guidelines for developing age-appropriate art lessons and projects for older students.

Older adults, even those without a background in the arts, are generally more willing than younger adults to take risks and less worried about what others may think of their projects, she said. They also bring a lifetime of experience and perspective to the creative environment.

“As our brains and bodies change, we compensate in creative ways,” Crawford said. “Older adults are talented, creative problem-solvers based on our collection of life experiences.”

The relaxed environment of a hands-on art class “promotes spontaneity and collaboration in older adults and allows freedom in a way that other parts of their lives don’t,” Crawford said. “It’s the creative process that has the power, not the final product.”

## It’s not about becoming an artist

At the Maine Arts Commission, Special Programs Director Kathleen Mundell oversees the Creative Aging program. She said Maine was one of 13 states invited in 2013 to participate in the program, based on its status as one of the oldest and most rural states in the nation. The program has been funded here since that time.

“Research tells us that

being engaged in the creative process as we age is good for us,” she said. “It feels good and it builds new connections in our brains. It’s as important to our well-being as exercise, diet and social engagement.”

And social engagement is an important element of the creative aging program. “A lot of the training we do with the artists focuses on social engagement, to counter the tendency toward isolation as we age,” Mundell said. Courses must be offered in six- to eight-week sessions and the material for each class must build sequentially on what was learned in the previous meeting, she said. In this way, participants learn to add new skills and ideas to those already learned while also building valuable relationships with classmates and instructors.

In addition, each course wraps up with a public invitation to visit the studio or other creative venue, view the artwork and mingle with the students and their families.

“The emphasis is not on becoming an artist,” Mundell said. “The larger goal is to explore creative approaches to problem-solving, develop new social networks and express who you are in a way that gets heard and reflected back to you.”

Mundell’s program has just approved a new round of projects to fund in the coming year. These include a pottery class in Augusta, a poetry class in Yarmouth and a traditional dance class in Lewiston.

## ‘You have to think fast’

Beginning in January, longtime dance instructor



Miriam Gregg works with oil pastel pencils in preparation for a paint resist project. Students in Pamela Crawford’s book-making class in Presque Isle last fall learned to create paper books using different materials and techniques.

and Lewiston native Cindy Larock, 63, will teach traditional English and Franco-American country dances in an old auditorium space at the Lewiston Public Library. While dance steps are basic and easily learned, she said, creativity comes with growing confidence that allows dancers to add their own twirls and flourishes in time with the music.

Dancing, especially in formations that move dancers through a series of partners, is excellent physical exercise that also calls for quick reflexes and problem-solving, she noted. “If that gent doesn’t come toward you

when he’s supposed to, you have to think fast and figure out how to get where you’re supposed to be at the right time,” she said. And since every partner is different in skill, style and body type, dancing builds skills in adaptivity and responsiveness, she said.

In addition to teaching the steps of the dances, Larock’s curriculum calls for participants, many of whom she expects will have grown up in area Franco-American households, to share their memories about homegrown music and dance traditions of generations past. “The sense of

community is enhanced by the opportunity to discuss our kinship, memories and shared cultural traditions,” she said.

Her final class session will bring in members of a local multigenerational folk orchestra, which includes several children, to play for a public dance. “It’s taking a cultural tradition, reintroducing it to a generation of people whose parents brought it to Maine and letting them put their 2015 spin on it,” Larock said.

In addition to Cindy Larock in Presque Isle and Pamela Crawford in Lewiston, Maine artists on the Cre-

ative Aging roster are certified to teach singing, painting, sculpture, photography, fiber arts, storytelling and other creative activities. The training is provided free of charge, but, in an effort to reach all areas of the state with a range of creative disciplines, artists must apply and be selected to participate. The next deadline for applications to the training program is May 2016. Applications for new community arts projects are due in April 2016.

For more information about the Creative Aging program, visit the website of the Maine Arts Commission.

# Meg

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pation in the world. And we don’t have to take out a second mortgage to do it, either.

At the most basic level, we can simply pay attention and take advantage of informal opportunities as they present themselves — public lectures, garden tours, concerts, exhibits, nature

walks and so on. In addition, Mainers 65 and older can take free courses, with or without earning academic credits, through the University of Maine System. Those 62 and older can take free courses through the Maine Community College System. For almost nothing, people 50 and older also can sign up for classes through the statewide Maine Senior College network, which offers an enticing array of choices ranging from introductory geonomics to rug-hooking.

Most communities, even the smallest and most rural, also offer affordable adult education classes through their local schools, including high school equivalency test preparation, adult literacy programs and “personal enrichment” offerings such as conversational Spanish, watercolor painting or dog obedience classes.

All of these options have the added benefit of getting us out of our houses and into the world in the good company of others whose ideas may sup-

port, challenge or enrich our own. As far as I can see, this business of being a lifelong learner can only be good for our psyches, our social lives and our self-esteem.

“The world is so full of a number of things, I’m sure we should all be as happy as kings,” wrote Robert Louis Stevenson in his 1885 collection, “A Child’s Garden of Verses.”

I couldn’t say it better myself, and I suspect that Betty Reilly, flashing that gorgeous smile, agrees, too.

# Noonan

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cessed. But I agree with the idea that at least some food from every meal should be. I also recommend choosing the less processed versions of your common foods. Fresh vegetables will deliver more nutrition than frozen; canned veggies have even less value. Vegetable juices have the least — they are highly processed. Choose whole fruit

over fruit juices. And avoid the “TV dinners” — you are much better off buying the individual ingredients and making your own meal.

Next week we will cover another wellness-based nutritional principle — organic and natural foods versus factory-farmed or GMO foods.

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