

AGING WELL

Splendido
AT RANCHO VISTOSO™

Adventures in lifelong learning

Splendido

Continuing to learn new things offers many benefits, including cultural enrichment, engagement with others, and even better brain health and sharper thinking. Research has shown that this is true for people of all ages—especially when combined with a social aspect, like taking a class with other interested students.

Residents at Splendido, an all-inclusive community in Tucson for those 55 and better, have ample opportunities to learn new things. They have set up an internal “college” where any resident can attend a variety of high-level classes led by experts. Called SIPP, for the Splendido Intellectual Pursuits Program, the program has been going for seven years and is resident-run—meaning it is planned and maintained entirely by volunteers who live at Splendido.

SIPP consists of a fall and spring semester, and current SIPP cochairs William Dresher and Lew Roscoe are finalizing preparations for the fall 2014 semester, which starts in September.

Roscoe estimates that about half of Splendido’s nearly 300 residents participate. “All the sessions are written up so that residents can read about them during a sign-up meeting,” he explains. “The popularity of the sessions really depends on the subject. Anywhere from six to 50 people may sign up.”

Some educational offerings are one-time lectures, and others might be multiple-session courses. It’s up to each presenter to structure the offering; residents pay just \$5 per session.

Presenters include volunteer residents, local experts, and professors (some retired) from the University of Arizona. “The university sciences have a successful outreach program, open, free and popular in the Tucson area, and our presenters are generally very happy to come and talk to us,” says Roscoe.

A WIDE VARIETY OF TOPICS

The offerings in SIPP can be intellectually challenging. For example, this fall residents can learn from professors or retired professors about evolutionary biology, the glial cells of the brain, Native Americans during the American colonial period, human development from birth to death, and an astronomer’s project of sending a rocket to an asteroid. These are just examples of the 15 courses offered.

There are also a variety of hands-on art classes taught by local artists, and other how-to courses such as an introduction to playing billiards.

Residents enjoy the variety of courses like the six-class series titled “Solving the World’s Problems,” which will feature a panel discussion on various topics, including the legalization of drugs. Another popular offering is “Smorgasbord,”



Courtesy Photo

Learning new things, such as studying a new language or mastering a more difficult level of crossword or Sudoku, actually helps your brain grow new connections between cells and protects against symptoms of dementia.

which offers eight different topics, each with a different presenter.

Splendido is drawing attention for SIPP and residents’ interest pursuing (and sharing) lifelong learning. SIPP earned a silver award for “Best Lifestyle Program” from the National Association of Home Builders in 2012, and has received a lot of local attention. (See “Intellectual Program” in the February 13, 2014 issue of *The Explorer*.)

DO-IT-YOURSELF SIPP

If the intellectual stimu-

lation (and brain-building benefits) of SIPP appeal to you, there are many ways you can create opportunities for lifelong learning in your life. Consider the following:

- Join a book club or discussion group—or start your own. Structuring selected titles or topics around a theme such as scientific discoveries or current events will help ensure your meetings include new learning and thinking.

- Sign up for local continuing education classes. Learn a new language or computer skill, study a topic that interests you, or expand your cre-

ativity with an art or writing class. Do an online search of “Tucson adult continuing education” to find resources.

- Take an online course. You’ll miss the in-person interaction of classroom instruction, but you can choose from limitless subjects and a variety of formats, from short TED talks (www.ted.com) to full-blown college-level courses.

- Volunteer. Sign up to help out with a local charity, and you’ll “do good” while you learn about a new area. Consider tutoring schoolchildren, working a telephone hotline,

or training other volunteers in your area of expertise.

- Expand your horizons with travel. Whether you head overseas or just across the state, plan a trip for yourself that includes learning about and visiting new places. Or you can sign up for a group tour or a Road Scholar educational trip (www.road-scholar.org).

These are just a few ways you can keep learning and living a brain-healthy life. With a little thought and imagination, you can find ways keep learning new things for many years to come.