

AGING WELL



A Lesson in Do-It-Yourself Lifelong Learning

Continuing to learn may be the best thing you can do to improve your cognition and memory. Research has shown that this is true for people of all ages—especially when learning 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. In addition to many classes and lectures offered by the community, they have set up their own internal “college,” in which any resident can attend a variety of high-level classes led by experts. Called SIPP, for the Splendido Intellectual Pursuits Program, the 11-year-old program is entirely planned and maintained by a committee of volunteers who live at Splendido.

A Wide Range of Topics

Held every fall and spring, SIPP features a variety of multi-session courses. “We spend months working on putting a term together. Altogether, we have a range of 50 to 80 hour-long sessions per term,” says SIPP Committee Chair Lew Roscoe. “It all depends on how many

presenters we can get.”

While Lew and his committee bring in outside experts, including faculty from the University of Arizona, the bulk of SIPP presenters are Splendido residents, who offer a range of knowledge and willingness to learn and present new subjects.

The courses in SIPP can be intellectually challenging. For example, this spring residents attended a series of four lectures on astronomy topics by faculty from the University of Arizona Steward Observatory. “These can get very technical; some of our residents are scientifically inclined, but these talks can be very interesting for anyone,” says Lew.

Splendido residents also learned about heart health topics from a resident who is an MD and retired faculty member at the Harvard Medical School. Lighter topics included “To the Ends of the Earth,” a series of lectures on places around the world that are unique because of their geography or history, and even a series on the history of Wonder Woman.

Ongoing Interest

The SIPP registrar, Charlie Cremin, says, “I’m a retired engineer and I’m analyti-



Challenging yourself to learn something new—particularly in a social situation like a classroom—can benefit your brain health, including memory and cognitive skills.

cal; I like to look at the statistics of what we’re doing. He estimates that about 60% of all 240+ Splendido residents participate in each SIPP term.

The most popular SIPP course every term is Smorgasbord, which offers eight different topics, each with a different presenter. “Smorgasbord is sort of taking over,” says Charlie, who points out that each single session within Smorgasbord outperformed even the most popular multi-session

course. This spring, Smorgasbord topics included 2017 income taxes, impressionist art, Manila and Singapore, and NASA’s asteroid sample return mission.

A Little Learning = Big Benefits

Splendido residents who attend—and plan—SIPP courses are reaping multiple benefits. In addition to boosting their brain health, they’re gaining cultural enrichment and engaging with others (also good for

your brain!).

“SIPP courses give people new subjects to talk about, and get residents communicating with each other,” Charlie points out. “It’s all good.”

Do-It-Yourself Learning

If the intellectual stimulation (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 dis-

cussion group. Structuring 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 language or computer skill, study a topic that interests you, or expand your creativity with an art or writing class.
- 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 (ted.com) to college-level courses.
- Volunteer. Sign up to help 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. Plan a trip for yourself that includes learning about and visiting new places. By applying a little thought and imagination, you can find ways to keep learning new things for many years to come.