

FROM OUTREACH TO IMPACT

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ALFA

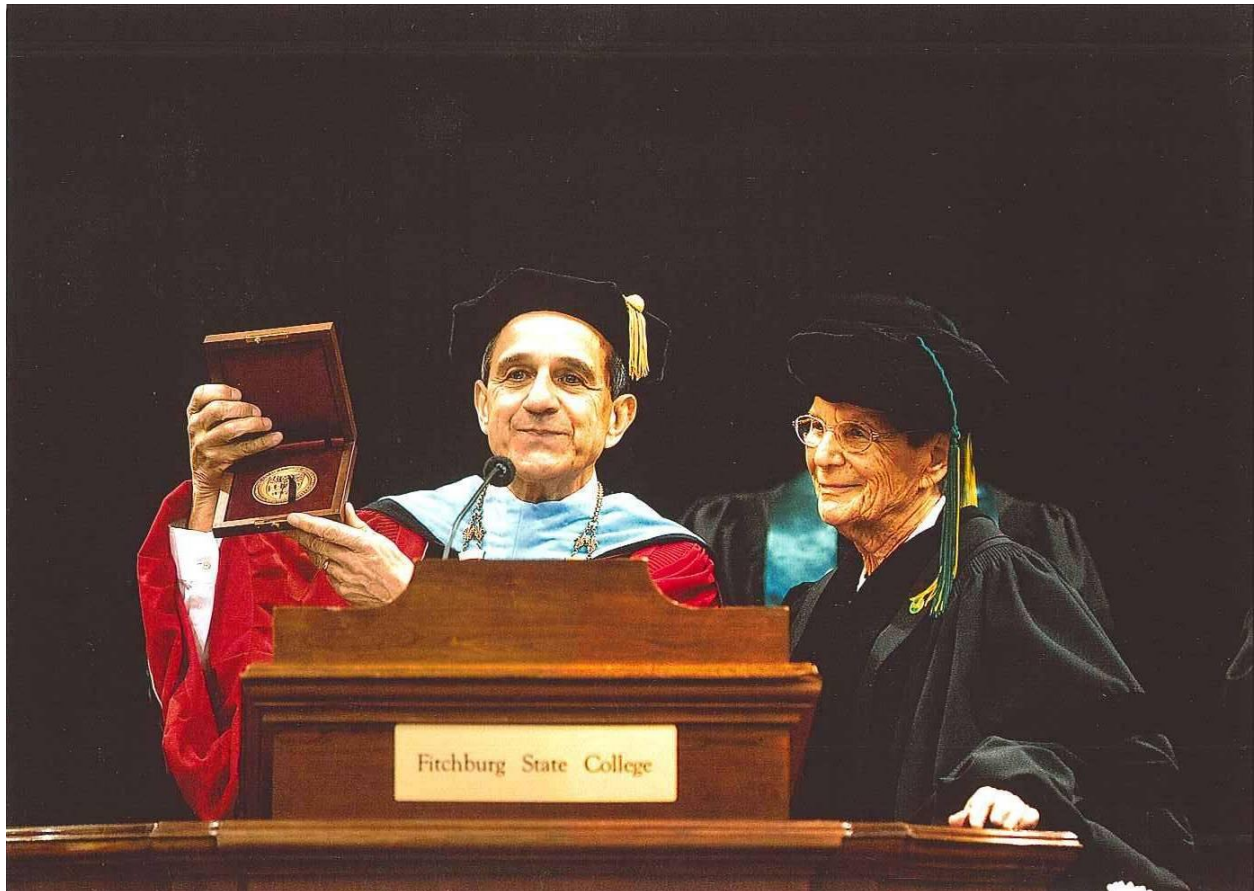
From 2004 – 2012



ALFA'S MISSION

**ALFA provides an opportunity for lifelong learners
to meet and share interests in an informal setting
and pursue learning for enrichment and personal growth.**

In Tribute to ALFA's Founder,
Shirley Pick



*Shirley Pick is awarded the President's Medal
by Fitchburg State President Robert Antonucci
January 25, 2008*

“ALFA has succeeded beyond anything we could have envisioned when we began... . To all of you who have helped ALFA to prosper and thrive, ‘Look what we have accomplished!’”

-Shirley Pick

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WELCOME TO ALFA

ALFA (Adult Learning in the Fitchburg Area), founded in the Spring of 2004, is a lifelong learning institute that serves adult learners in Fitchburg and surrounding communities. ALFA is sponsored by the Office of Academic Affairs and the Office of Graduate and Continuing Education at Fitchburg State University. ALFA offers non-credit daytime classes and special events. Members are encouraged to volunteer and participate in program leadership and development as well as social and recreational activities.

Founding Council:

Beatrice Adams
Cathy Canney
Barbara Chaplin
Andrienne Clark
Philip Fallon
Edmund Frederick
Pat Frederick
Norman Fredette
Anne Johnson
Connie Larrabee
Jean Miller
Beverly Mulholland
Thomas Mulholland

Jane Murphy
Karen Pick
Shirley Pick
Harry Semerjian
Marc Speiser
Mary Lewis Thorne
Stephen Thorne
Sally Tracy
Sherry Tuck
Shirley Wagner
Peggy Weaver
Mary Whitney
Muriel Ross

ALFA BOARD – 2012-2013

Fitchburg State Liaison – Brian Bercier

Executive Committee:

Carol DeCarolis, President
Bruce Goyette, Vice President
Linda Kennedy, 2nd Vice President
Joyce Hinckley, Board Secretary
Sally Hens, Treasurer

Committee Chairs:

Brian Bercier, Curriculum
Lauretta Conlon, Special Events
Phil Fallon, Spring Series & Nominations
Bruce Goyette, ALFA-BITS
Stuart McDermott, Publicity
Bill Stevenson, Food for Thought

At Large Board Members:

Bea Adams
Joseph Addante
Janet Cragin
Norman Fredette
Eleanor Gilmartin
Carol Kearns
Vince LaRue

Bev Mulholland
Tom Mulholland
Karen Pick
Harry Semerjian
Marc Speiser
Gilbert Tremblay
Shirley Wagner

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ALFA'S ORIGINS

In 2002, Dr. Robert Antonucci took the helm as the new president of Fitchburg State*. He came with energy, an open mind, a creative approach, and commitment to the local area. He spoke of OUTREACH to the community, and Fitchburg resident Shirley Pick responded to his call. She and her husband, Dr. Walter Pick, had been participants in lifelong learning programs at HILR (Harvard Institute for Learning in Retirement) and WISE (Assumption's Worcester Institute for Senior Education). After the death of her husband, Shirley began to entertain the notion that perhaps a similar program could be developed at Fitchburg State. As an alumna of Fitchburg State, Shirley had a strong sense of loyalty and devotion to her alma mater. She also believed in community involvement as evidenced by her years as a nurse, teacher, literacy volunteer, local League of Women Voters president, and the first Board president and a mediator for the North Central Court Mediation Program. Feisty and irrepressible at 82, she thought nothing of taking on a new challenge.

In the fall of 2003, Shirley approached her neighbor, newly retired Fitchburg Public School Superintendent, Dr. Philip Fallon, with the idea of developing such an adult learning program at Fitchburg State. He immediately recognized that it was a good idea and worth pursuing. He then approached Fitchburg State President Antonucci while Shirley contacted Dr. Shirley Wagner, Vice President of Academic Affairs at Fitchburg State whom she knew from their mutual efforts on behalf of the North Central Court Mediation Services. Both Shirley and Phil were received with enthusiasm and encouragement. "Go for it!" they were told, and they were granted approval for their project.

* * * * *

On November 24, 2003, the first informal meeting of a steering committee took place around Shirley Pick's dining room table at 71 Ellis Street in Fitchburg. The original committee included:

Tom Mulholland
Harry Semerjian
Mary Whitney
Andrienne Clark
Steven Thorne
Jane Murphy
Shirley Pick
Karen Pick
Shirley Wagner represented Fitchburg State
Phil Fallon chaired the meeting
Mary Lewis Thorne took the minutes

*(Fitchburg State College became Fitchburg State University in 2010. For the purpose of this account, the college/university will be referred to as Fitchburg State.)

With the exception of Shirley Pick, none of the committee members had attended or had familiarity with adult learning programs. When asked to participate, however, all responded without hesitation. The outlook was positive from the outset. Topics of discussion during that exploratory meeting revolved around identifying the target audience, the range and content of classes that would appeal to both men and women, potential presenters, location, time of day, tuition and costs, and the need to establish a founding council. Those present were asked to recruit additional members.

The hope was that perhaps a fledgling program could begin the following fall. Shirley Wagner thought there was no reason a pilot program couldn't be launched in March 2004 – only four months away.

To proceed, the program would need a name, a mission, instructors, a venue, a brochure, and publicity outreach. At this initial meeting, the first requirement was met: a name was selected. Karen Pick had devised a list of possibilities. The choice of ALFA – Adult Learning in the Fitchburg Area – was unanimous. (Or we might have been called LEAF, FLAP, or FLING!)

ALFA'S PILOT PROGRAM

By January 2, 2004 when the second meeting was held at the McKay Campus School at Fitchburg State, the steering committee had doubled to form a 26 member Founding Council. These founding members represented Fitchburg and its neighboring towns and brought with them varied skills, outlooks, and expertise.

Shirley and Karen Pick studied the program goals, structure, and mission statements for HILR, WISE, Brandeis's BALI program, Tufts' TILR and Dartmouth's ILEAD. ALFA's description and mission statement evolved as a result and reflected Shirley's aspiration that lifelong learning and socialization opportunities go hand in hand. This marriage of intentions, from the beginning, distinguished ALFA from many other programs. Also, participants would be welcome regardless of educational background, and the words *seniors* and *retirees* were avoided in order to be more inclusive.

The Founding Council met just 4 additional times prior to the inauguration of the Pilot Program. The Council quickly established a program format. Fees were determined: \$25 a course for a 5-week session. Time allotment: 1 1/2 hrs. per week during the afternoon. Location: McKay Campus School C-Wing. Fitchburg State privileges including ID Cards and access to Center Stage events and Fitchburg State Library were made available to ALFA students. There would be accessible parking and Fitchburg State would handle registration. Opening dates: March 29 and 30, 2004.

Shirley Wagner and Harry Semerjian made overtures to two Fitchburg State instructors. Dr. Joshua Spero, Assistant Professor of Political Science, and Dr. Susan Williams, Associate Professor of History, signed on to teach the first two pilot courses: *The Middle East: Challenges for the Future* and *Consuming The Past: Material Culture and Historical Memory*. They would receive compensation in the form of college perks – credit time - rather than financial compensation.

The first brochure was initially a homemade affair. Shirley and Karen Pick crafted a rough draft using the old-fashioned cut and paste method, i.e. with scissors and scotch tape. After committee review, Fitchburg State then put its imprint. Shirley Wagner developed a registration form, and the College absorbed the initial printing costs. The Spring 2004 brochure was a single fold-over sheet and featured an early apple logo.

A newly formed Membership/Publicity Committee under Tom Mulholland outlined a plan for membership outreach and recruiting in various communities. Presentations at selected sites were arranged. Connie Larrabee and Andrienne Clark wrote press releases. All printing and submissions were handled by Cathy Canney, Fitchburg State's Associate Dean of Graduate and Continuing Education. Press releases were submitted to 30 area publications.

The first printing of ALFA brochures numbered 1,500. When the brochures were ready for distribution, a group of volunteers met to prepare them for mailing and delivery to area sites. This practice continued for several years until ALFA had its own Fitchburg State secretary. These were always much anticipated and animated gatherings as the arrival of the brochures generated a lot of excitement.

With the distribution of the brochures, an all-out effort was made to get the word out about ALFA's debut. Registrations began to come in.

During the course of the pre-pilot meetings, several other defining steps were taken to advance ALFA:

February 17, 2004

The curriculum committee began developing the program for Fall 2005.

March 2, 2004

A nominating committee was established and chaired by Mary Lewis Thorne.

March 23, 2004

Plans for a spring annual meeting were set in motion.

The revenue taken in from the Pilot classes - \$1,250 – was rolled over into an ALFA account for start-up costs.

The nominating committee created positions for a first-time Board, each with a one-year term. Some positions would be filled in the interim, but a full slate would be officially presented at the June 14th annual meeting.

The pilot classes opened on March 29 and 30, 2004. The incoming classes were met by meeters and greeters from the Board and Founding Council. A welcoming reception with refreshments was arranged for each class. Cathy Canney recruited a reporter to be present. Dr. Antonucci addressed each opening session. The classes were an immediate and unqualified success. Records show that 34 attended the *Mid-East* class and 23 attended *Consuming the Past*.

Dr. Spero and Dr. Williams were a hit with the ALFA attendees. It was clear that we were on the threshold of something very special.

NEXT STEPS

Immediately following the pilot classes, several other formative activities bear mention:

April 15, 2004

The issues of by-laws and rotating terms for Board members were raised. By the next meeting, Norm Fredette presented an outline derived from Robert's Rules of Order for the establishment of by-laws. An interim by-law committee was formed and a draft of the by-laws was presented for consideration in the fall of 2005. After multiple revisions, it was accepted on November 16, 2005. From time to time since then, a by-law committee has been reinstated to revise and amend and to accommodate expanding and changing roles and requirements.

May 11, 2004

The question was raised regarding the formation of the upcoming ALFA Board. The founding members had become so invested in ALFA, they wanted to know, "What's going to happen to us?" There was unanimous agreement that the remarkable spirit of the group be preserved. Thus, it was decided that the Board would consist of executive officers and everyone else would serve as at-large members. The size and composition of today's Board reflects that. Today the Board membership is set at 25, one of whom is the Fitchburg State liaison and 5 of whom constitute the Executive Committee. With the exception of ALFA's liaison, all Board members are volunteers. The Board has maintained its spirit and works like a charm.

June 14, 2004

At the annual meeting hosted by Shirley Wagner and Fitchburg State, Mary Lewis Thorne presented the slate of officers and chairpersons for the first official Board.

They were:

President – Phil Fallon
Vice President – Sally Tracy
Treasurer – Mary Whitney
Secretary – Shirley Pick

Nominating Committee – Mary Lewis Thorne
Membership/Publicity – Tom Mulholland
Curriculum – Harry Semerjian
By-laws – Norman Fredette
Special Events – Sherry Tuck

ALFA was developing momentum. It was defining itself and finding its footing. It was forging ahead. In September 2004, with the success of the pilot program, an Open House was held at the McKay School to introduce ALFA to a broader audience. After that, there was no holding back the growth of ALFA.

A WINNING COMBINATION

When Shirley Pick first approached people in the community to participate in the development of what would eventually evolve into ALFA, she was consistently surprised at the immediate and overwhelmingly positive response to the idea. That enthusiasm, support and commitment has persisted and only grown stronger over time. Volunteer participation is what fuels the ALFA program, and the Fitchburg State/volunteer collaboration is what drives its success. Whenever a new idea has been floated or a need identified, a volunteer has been swift to respond. Today, volunteers plan curriculum, arrange trips and events, create the ALFA-BITS newsletter, engage Food For Thought speakers and Shirley Pick Spring Series presenters, meet and greet incoming classes, act as class aides, and handle publicity.

The driving force behind the ALFA program from its inception has been the remarkable and unique cooperative relationship with Fitchburg State. Not only did Fitchburg State embrace the concept of lifelong learning, but it recognized it as part of its state college mandate to serve the community. The ramifications of this core belief have been many.

From the beginning, President Robert Antonucci gave ALFA his full support. Dr. Shirley Wagner became ALFA's Fitchburg State liaison and served in that capacity from the initial informal meeting in November 2003 until her retirement in June 2012. She arranged for the first two pilot classes in the spring of 2004 and continued to engage Fitchburg State resources, arrange for the participation of staff and faculty, and express her personal support and that of Fitchburg State in countless ways.

After the success of the pilot program, it was determined that costs to ALFA participants would be kept to an affordable low of \$25 per class, Fitchburg State faculty would continue to receive credit time, and a stipend of \$250 would be offered to instructors outside of Fitchburg State. This mix of Fitchburg State instructors and presenters from the community has kept ALFA's finances in balance and has allowed for a wealth of curriculum options.

Outstanding in-house staff have always been made available. They were instrumental in getting the program up and running and are responsible for its smooth and professional operation. They secure classroom and meeting space, arrange for parking ID's, interact with professors and other presenters, see to the printing of brochures and the ALFA-BITS newsletter, and provide all manner of secretarial and organizational assistance behind the scenes.

Originally, Peggy Weaver, Director of the Professional Development Center (later called the Center for Professional Studies) and her secretary Jennifer Daigle (Testagrossa) were ALFA's main backstays. Jennifer's design for the first printing of ALFA-BITS is still reflected in today's heading and format. Cathy Canney, then Associate Dean of Graduate and Continuing Education, also provided guidance and assistance.

Shirley Wagner's staff in the Office of Academic Affairs has become increasingly involved in ALFA as the program has expanded. Rita Jeffries, Sara Ringquist and Carla McGrath have provided invaluable service. Their input and expertise have left and continue to leave an incalculable impact upon the program.

Shirley Wagner has also overseen the ALFA part-time office secretary, from our first secretary (and unabashed ALFA “cheerleader”) Beverly Hollows to our current ALFA secretary, Diane Thibodeau.

ALFA never could have evolved as it has without the substantial and generous support of Fitchburg State personnel.

Among the brightest jewels in ALFA’s crown are the Fitchburg State faculty who have embraced the ALFA program and given it their all. Perhaps wary at first of the “old kids on the block,” they soon found that they had an ardent, respectful, and appreciative student body before them. The result has been a “mutual admiration society”. The professors found they enjoyed teaching lifelong learners as much as their students enjoyed them.

Over the years, ALFA participants have had the privilege of access to faculty in a wide range of disciplines: History, Political Science, Economics, Literature, Biology and Chemistry, American Studies, Geology, Music, and Art, to name a few. The instructors have consistently brought their enthusiasm, commitment, and expertise to bear on their classes.

One unusual and noteworthy consequence of the administration and faculty/ALFA collaboration had been a kind of crossover effect – whereby Fitchburg State instructors join in to teach classes well outside their field of study. Shirley Wagner, historian and Vice President of Academic Affairs, has taught the fine art of soup making and a class on mystery writers. A look at the cover of the Spring 2012 brochure shows Eric Budd, professor of Economics, History, and Political Science, along with a group of ALFA chefs, conducting an Asian cooking class. (For a complete list of Fitchburg State/ALFA instructors see the Appendix.)

In addition to supporting ALFA with personnel and fiscal backing, Fitchburg State has been most generous in its allotment of space. An ALFA office was made available in the McKay Building in the fall of 2006. Board and committee meetings have been held at McKay or at the downtown Center for Professional Studies.

While most classes are conducted in the C-Wing of the McKay School, some music classes have been taught in Conlon Hall. Water aerobics classes have been held at the Fitchburg State Recreation Center Pool. Zumba and other fitness classes have taken place at the Fitchburg State Recreation Center Dance Studio. The Hammond Building has served as the venue for annual meetings and the Shirley Pick Spring Series programs. ALFA’s 5th Anniversary Celebration was held in the Fitchburg State Recreation Center.

REACHING OUT

In the fall of 2004, the first off-site program took place at the Historical Piano Study Center in Ashburnham. Patricia and Edmund M. Frederick conducted a program called *The Classical Piano: Hearing Music in Its Own Colors*. They showcased their collection of historical pianos and played the music of classical composers on the instruments that best reflected their historical time frame.

Other off-site classes quickly followed. In the fall of 2005, courses on *Women in Art* and *Looking at Art* were conducted by Donalyn Schofield at the Fitchburg Art Museum, and a course on *Contemporary Legal Issues* (later called *Order in the Court*) taught by Judge Elliott Zide made its debut at the Fitchburg District Courthouse.

Soon other venues were added: Liberty Place Fitness Center and Anwelt Heritage Apartments on Oak Hill Road for Mike Kressy's T'ai Chi classes; the Fitchburg High School Home Economics Room for the ever-popular cooking classes; the FATV studio for *Home Video Editing*.

In the fall of 2008, ALFA established a partnership with the Leominster Public Library which sponsored a free course for ALFA students called *They Suck: Vampires in Literature, Film and on TV*, funded by Friends of Leominster Public Library. The library has continued to host a wide variety of classes, one each session, since then.

By spring 2012, several new venues opened up. A free class on the *Historical Facts of Farming in Fitchburg* was sponsored by the Fitchburg Senior Center. For birding enthusiasts, local parks and conservation areas became their outdoor classroom.

Instructors from outside of Fitchburg State are granted a stipend of \$250 or a fraction thereof if classes are taught by multiple instructors. Some non-Fitchburg State instructors volunteer their services in keeping with the mandates of their jobs or the goodness of their hearts.

These instructors are drawn from all walks of life to share their wide-ranging interests, talents, and world views with ALFA members. Classes have ranged from *Zumba* taught by a local instructor to *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Union* conducted by Cris Martin, Director of the Outreach Program at the Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies at Harvard University. (For a complete list of non-Fitchburg State instructors, please see the Appendix.)

With Fitchburg State's firm backing, ALFA has expanded well beyond the university walls. It has truly become a community venture.

I. CURRICULUM COMMITTEE

The role of the Curriculum Committee has been pivotal to ALFA's success. Harry Semerjian initially served as Curriculum Chair before the role shifted to Shirley Pick. Since Shirley did not have email or a computer, she pieced together programs from information scouted by her actively engaged committee members and from personal phone inquiries. An instructor bio sheet was devised to facilitate information gathering. The program was mapped out on a big calendar that was amended at each curriculum meeting. As information became available, Shirley and daughter Karen wrote out course and bio descriptions for the upcoming brochure with the aim of making them brief, catchy and informative. (As course content expanded over the years, so did the brochure. The fold-over flyer finally gave way to booklet form in the spring of 2011.) In the early years, a curriculum committee member would make it a

point to sit in on each new class to touch base with the instructor, see that the class was running smoothly, and assess member response.

A class evaluation form distributed at the end of each 5-week session solicited ideas from students for future course content. As lists of ideas were generated, curriculum committee members became scouts in search of instructors. College instructors and local talent were brought in to meet as many requests as possible.

Fitchburg State instructors unaccustomed to teaching older adults didn't quite know what to expect upon their first encounters with ALFA students. Some instructors were found nervously pacing the halls in anticipation of their first class. They were soon surprised and relieved to find that they had an attentive audience who brought with them a wealth of life experience and an eagerness to participate. It didn't take these instructors long to realize that their expertise was valued and they were appreciated, and before long, they themselves were requesting to teach ALFA classes.

Some classes have proved so popular that they have made encore appearances or spawned variations on a theme, such as Armchair Travel, Cooking Classes, T'ai Chi, Order in the Court, Savoring Tea Clad in Mystery, classes on music, the Middle East, to name a few.

One curriculum offering bears special mention. In spring 2006, the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival for New England came to Fitchburg under the direction of Kelly Morgan, professor of English/Theater at Fitchburg State.

Kelly Morgan offered a course to ALFA students following the theater festival called *Concepts and Critiquing of Live Theater* that focused on analyzing, discussing, and reviewing productions and performances. Performance tickets were free to ALFA students and events were held at the Sheraton Four Points Hotel, Fitchburg State, and the Monty Tech Dukakis Center for the Performing Arts.

Theater Festival offerings went on for 5 days and nights and ALFA participants couldn't get enough of them. Some strong and enduring friendships were forged among fellow theatergoers. The program generated so much excitement and was such a success that the following year, there was a *Concepts and Critiquing* class Part I prior to the Festival followed by Part II in the weeks after. During the 3rd season of the festival, ALFA members attended once again. For many, participation in the theater festival and the courses with Kelly Morgan were and remain ALFA highlights.

In 2006, when Sandra Lawson came on as Curriculum Chair and Beverly Hollows became ALFA's first Fitchburg State designated secretary, curriculum planning entered the computer age. In their capable hands, the curriculum expanded exponentially to meet increasing demand and the brochure expanded to reflect that.

In 2010, it became apparent that curriculum planning had outgrown the purview of a volunteer chairperson and required the direct organization and support of the college. Shirley Wagner, our college liaison, assumed the role of Curriculum Chair and her topnotch office staff,

already engaged, became even more involved. Shirley filled the role with distinction until her retirement in June 2012.

II. PUBLICITY COMMITTEE

Originally held by Tom Mulholland, the role of Publicity Committee Chair was taken over by Vince LaRue. For several years, Vince rounded up volunteers before each fall and spring ALFA session to stuff and stamp envelopes for mailing brochures. Since then, the task of labeling and mailing has fallen to the ALFA office secretary, and ALFA mailings now have a non-profit designation.

Over time, brochure distribution has expanded to include more than 20 towns. Committee members assume responsibility for covering certain towns and delivering brochures to designated sites such as libraries, senior centers, museums, markets, fitness centers, and offices. There are ongoing presentations and efforts to broadcast ALFA's offerings and attract new members, including occasional interviews on local cable television.

III. MEET AND GREET/CLASS AIDES

In the beginning, ALFA Board and founding members served as meet and greet volunteers at the start of each new 5 - week ALFA session. The aim was to make new ALFA participants feel welcome and comfortable, answer questions, and facilitate opening day. The meet and greet component of ALFA is still a hallmark.

Prior to Bev Hollows being installed as a part time ALFA office secretary in 2006, preparation of class aide folders and orientation of class aides was another homegrown operation. Karen Pick created the information forms for class aides, the welcome letter to instructors, the telephone tree, and class evaluations. Along with attendance lists, these constituted the class aide folders.

Class aides were selected to promote a congenial classroom atmosphere, provide a contact for the instructor, take attendance, collect parking information, disseminate notices via ALFA ALERTS, set up a telephone tree in the event of class cancellations, and see that class evaluations were filled out and returned at the close of each session. These evaluations would later serve to enable the Curriculum Committee to select future courses based on participants' suggestions. Also, Shirley Pick wrote individual thank you letters to each instructor, sharing comments culled from class evaluations. Subsequently, a Meet and Greet/Class Aides Committee was formed under the chairmanship of Linda Kennedy to oversee the recruitment and orientation of volunteers and the weekly update, distribution and return of class folders. Linda still sends out handwritten thank you's.

IV. ALFA HANDBOOK

It became clear by the end of ALFA's first year that it was important to codify Board and Committee responsibilities as new people assumed roles on the ALFA Board and as Committee Chairs. A handbook was created for the 2005 - 2006 year by Shirley and Karen Pick with the aid of Steven and Sharon Hendricks. This first handbook described the roles of the 5-member Executive Committee and the 4 original committee chairs - Curriculum, Membership, Special Functions (now Special Events), and Nominations, as well as the role of Class Aides.

The ALFA Board of Directors Handbook was updated in 2008 – 2009 to reflect expanding or revised roles and the addition of committees, e.g. Food For Thought, Class Aide/Meet & Greet, ALFA-BITS, ALFA Plus (renamed the Shirley Pick Spring Series in 2010 following Shirley's retirement due to illness).

It was again revised in 2011 – 2012 to fine-tune the Board and Committee Chair descriptions and to include ALFA Policies, a Volunteer Information Sheet, and sample committee forms.

V. ALFA-BITS

The first ALFA Newsletter, ALFA-BITS, came out in January 2005. It began as a simple fold over presenting the President's note, highlights of the 5 classes offered that session, a review of Dr. Shirley Wagner's WINTER RESPITE offerings, some quotes of note, and an announcement for an upcoming ALFA Book Club featuring Barbara Ehrenreich's *Nickel and Dimed*. The first newsletter was compiled by Shirley Pick and Karen Pick with the assistance of Fitchburg State's Professional Development Center Secretary Jennifer Daigle. By June of that year, Sharon and Steven Hendricks joined up to assist on an expanded twice-yearly newsletter.

In June 2007, Bruce Goyette became general editor and Gloria O'Brien became feature editor and the newsletter began to evolve to its current format, which informs, entertains and provides outreach to current and prospective ALFAs.

In 2012, 950 households were on the ALFA-BITS mailing list.

VI. FOOD FOR THOUGHT

In October 2006, a new program was introduced featuring monthly speakers and events to provide "food for thought" and fellowship to be followed by refreshments. Bill Stevenson assumed chairmanship of the Food For Thought Committee. The inaugural program presented: *All You Need to Know About Homeland Security* by Thomas W. Connell II, Chief Operations Officer – Disaster Management Solutions, Inc. based in Westminster.

The monthly programs gradually evolved to 2 programs during the fall/winter session and 2 programs in the winter/spring session. These "one shot" presentations have included a host of

talented speakers and a wide range of topics, among them: The Paranormal, Russian History, NEADS (Dogs for Deaf and Disabled Americans, out of Princeton), Today's Native American, Thoreau's Journey West, Peter and Debbie Lincoln who shared their travel adventures to each of the 351 towns and cities in Massachusetts, Identity Theft, Building a School in Mali, and *Life in Hitler's Backyard*, delivered by ALFA's own Bea Adams.

VII. WINTER RESPITE

In January of 2005, Shirley Wagner, ALFA's Fitchburg State liaison, organized and sponsored a mid-winter bonanza she called WINTER RESPITE, a trio of presentations designed to ward off the winter doldrums and "invigorate the mind and spirit". This program continued for the winters of 2006 – 2008 and consistently lived up to its billing. The offerings were always unusual and intriguing and covered a wide range of topics. Some outstanding examples: *The Real and Virtual World of Fireflies* presented by Dr. Christopher Cratsley and Dr. Kevin Austin of Fitchburg State, which focused on how the study of fireflies applies to cancer research; the nostalgic and stirring film by Fitchburg State alumnus Aaron Cadieux, *A Time to Reflect: The History of Whalom Park*; and *What The Nose Knows* by Fitchburg State professor Tom Schoenfeld. Other offerings featured music, drama, art, Fitchburg history, Civil War history, criminal justice, young adult literature, and one posed the question "What's in a Name?"

The WINTER RESPITE programs, accompanied each time by a generous and festive luncheon, were enriching, lively, memorable and a bright spot during winter intercession. These special afternoons were truly a gift that Shirley Wagner bestowed upon ALFA.

VIII. ANNUAL MEETINGS

From ALFA's opening in 2004 to the present, 2012, Shirley Wagner also sponsored the Annual Luncheon Meeting each June. While the purpose of an annual meeting is ostensibly to elect the new slate of ALFA officers, Shirley has never been one to let an opportunity to celebrate go by unheralded.

Each year, in addition to an elaborate spread, there has been some spirited entertainment. At the first annual meeting in June 2004, then Board member and ALFA instructor Pat Frederick of The Historical Piano Study Center performed a lively spring-themed sing-along as she played keyboard. In the following years, we were entertained by the Appleseed Barbershop Chorus, a ukulele player, and a 13-year-old guitarist, the grandson of current ALFA/Fitchburg State secretary Diane Thibodeau.

For one never-to-be- forgotten annual meeting, Shirley engaged a belly dancer to perform. This was such a rousing success that an ALFA class in belly dancing soon followed.

Shirley Wagner has decidedly left her unique imprint on a host of ALFA programs, as clearly exemplified by her original and provocative annual meetings.

IX. SPECIAL EVENTS

The Special Events Committee's outreach has grown in scope since ALFA's opening days. Sherry Tuck served as the first Special Events Chair. From the outset, the committee has arranged for the delightful annual winter holiday luncheons for Board members, most of which have been held at the Harley House in Lunenburg.

In April 2006, the committee instituted an inaugural trip to the Tower Hill Botanic Garden. This was followed in May 2007 by a trip to the Peabody Essex Art Museum in Salem, which was featuring the China House exhibit. Since then, because of the overwhelmingly positive response, trips are now being scheduled 4 times a year, and have included such venues as: The American Textile Museum at the Lowell National Historic Park, Boston Symphony Orchestra, Fruitlands Museum in Bolton, the Isabella Stuart Gardner Museum in Boston, Historic Deerfield and the National Yiddish Book Center in Amherst, and Strawberry Banke in Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

In 2009, the Special Events Committee, under then Chair Carol DeCarolis, organized ALFA's wonderful 5th Anniversary Celebration, which hosted ALFA members and instructors. The program featured a photo exhibit of ALFA's first 5 years created by Beverly Mulholland, comments by ALFA's first president, Phil Fallon, ALFA's then president Norman Fredette, Fitchburg State President Robert Antonucci, reflections by founder Shirley Pick, and a poem entitled "Take 5" by Karen Pick. Janet Cragin and Bob Blake of the Stratton Players presented an excerpt from Robert Anderson's play *I'm Herbert*. This was followed by 3 Fitchburg State/ALFA professors – Dr. Jane Fiske, Dr. John Paul and Dr. Rachel Boersma - who provided brief samples highlighting their fields of expertise. Refreshments were served and a DVD program, devised by Bruce Goyette with Dr. Jane Fiske's music in the background, rounded out the celebration and tribute to ALFA's amazing first 5 years.

X. THE SHIRLEY PICK SPRING SERIES

By 2008, ALFA members had made it clear that they wished the spring offerings to be expanded. The consensus was that the April closing date of the 2nd spring session was too early. Thus the ALFA Plus program was initiated to meet the demand. This entailed a once-a-week program of 1 ½ - 2 hours for 3 weeks in May. Shirley Pick inaugurated the first programs.

The first speaker was former U.S. Ambassador to Yemen and Middle East expert George M. Lane. His presentations addressed: 1) The Current Iraq Situation 2) Palestinian/Israeli Peace Prospects 3) The Current Situation in Lebanon. He was so well received that he returned again in May 2009, this time to speak about the Afghanistan/Pakistan situation and continue his discussions about Iraq and about the Palestinian/Israeli Peace Process.

In May of 2010, to honor ALFA's founder Shirley Pick who had recently retired from ALFA, the Board renamed the ALFA Plus program The Shirley Pick Spring Series. Phil Fallon assumed the chairmanship of the Spring Series.

During the May 2010 Spring Series, local author Mark Bodanza shared historical insight regarding the local impact of Abolition in the 1840's, The Football Rivalry between Fitchburg and Leominster, and other local lore. Mark returned again in 2011.

In December 2010, with the death of ALFA's founder Shirley Pick, donations that were made in her memory found their way to the Spring Series.

The 2012 Spring Series was entitled *Weaving American Threads Through Story, History and Song*. With the generous donations of ALFA members, Fitchburg State instructors, family and friends, it was now possible to engage multiple presenters from a broader network of options. The resulting program was enthusiastically received.

Acclaimed storyteller Sharon Kennedy did a moving reenactment of the life and times of a Lowell mill girl in 1847. Joyce Hinckley, ALFA board member, gifted and versatile instructor, and fellow class participant shared the history of immigrants and mill owners and the impact of their legacy on New England. The 3rd program featured historian and musician Scott Ainslee who combined story, history and song in his presentation of songs of conscience that spanned from the heyday of the mills to the present crisis of Mexican workers desperate to cross the U.S. border for work. Each program was followed by a reception and an opportunity to meet the presenter.

Weaving American Threads with its interplay of history and the arts served as a reflection of Shirley Pick's immigrant origins, wide-ranging interests, and commitment to community. It was a most fitting tribute. Future Shirley Pick Spring Series will strive to replicate its success.

* * * * *

ALFA: A WORK IN PROGRESS

It is now 2012 and ALFA has completed 8 years. It has become an integral part of Fitchburg State University and serves an ever-expanding community of adult learners. What started as a seed of an idea has taken firm root and is flourishing.

In 2004, ALFA's pilot program opened with 2 classes and 57 enrollees.

In the 2011 - 2012 fall and spring sessions there were 65 classes and 1004 enrollees.

There are 2,200 brochures printed for distribution.

ALFA members are drawn from more than 20 communities.

The ALFA program takes place in multiple venues, on campus and off.

ALFA's instructors are drawn from Fitchburg State and the wider community.

ALFA has realized and continues to pursue its mission.

ALFA is a lifelong learning program that is welcoming, inclusive, and responsive to ever-increasing community demand.

ALFA has made its mark.

At Fitchburg State's January graduation ceremony in 2008, Dr. Antonucci awarded Shirley Pick the President's Medal in recognition of her contribution to the community in founding the ALFA program.

Shirley, an ardent advocate of lifelong learning, was a visionary and an innovator. She was also a hands-on and active participant in all things ALFA. During her tenure, she served in multiple capacities as – curriculum chair, first ALFA secretary, brochure developer, ALFA-BITS creator, ALFA Plus originator, publicity committee member, meeter and greeter, and ALFA student. Indeed, she spawned the idea that sparked ALFA, but she was the first to acknowledge that without legs and wings, a backbone and a heart, an idea alone won't carry you far. Fortunately, ALFA has had all of those in abundance. Thanks to Dr. Robert Antonucci, Dr. Shirley Wagner, and Dr. Phil Fallon who embraced the idea and became staunch advocates from the start, and the creative, dedicated and spirited group of volunteers, instructors, and staff, ALFA took off running, lifted off the ground and took flight. Gradually, it got its bearing and asserted itself, and in the process touched people's lives and made them richer and better. What a wonderful accomplishment! What a legacy!

This is the story of ALFA. The story is based on a collection of ALFA source material (including early hand written minutes) and a backlog of memories. Any inaccuracies, oversights or flights of fancy must be attributed to the author. It is readable thanks to the tireless efforts of Eleanor Gilmartin and Diane Thibodeau.

It is hoped that this brief account will convey how exciting and rewarding it has been to witness ALFA's emergence and coming of age, and what a privilege it has been to be part of ALFA's history in the making. May ALFA continue to prosper and thrive.

Karen Pick
On Behalf of ALFA
Fall 2012

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AWARD RECIPIENT



Shirley Pick

President's Medal

Fitchburg resident Shirley Pick is a Fitchburg State alumna and a longtime community volunteer.

Pick is a founder of the Adult Learning in the Fitchburg Area (ALFA) program at Fitchburg State. ALFA is a collaboration of community volunteers and the college's offices of Academic Affairs and the Graduate and Continuing Education.

ALFA, whose mission is to provide lifelong learners with the opportunity to pursue learning for enrichment and personal growth, began as a two-class pilot program in the spring of 2004. That fall, six classes were created, and the program has continued to thrive ever since. Twelve classes will be offered during the upcoming first spring session, with 13 available in March and April.

The seeds for ALFA were planted long before 2004. Pick has always nourished her love of learning. After their retirement, she and her husband, Walter, took courses at the Harvard Institute for Learning in Retirement. Next, the pair studied at the Worcester Institute for Senior Education at Assumption College. Pick wanted to see if an adult learning program could work at Fitchburg State, so she contacted friends and college representatives. With their support, ALFA was established.

Pick's community involvement has included serving as president of the League of Women Voters. She also was the first president, a board member, and mediator of the North Central Court Mediation Services. In 2005 she was honored as a Community Builder by the United Way of North Central Massachusetts for her years of service as a literary volunteer and a board member for the Literacy Volunteers of the Montachusett Area.

She was a reading instructor at Memorial Junior High School and St. Joseph's School in Fitchburg. Later she taught at Montachusett Regional Vocational Technical High School.

Pick received her bachelor's degree in education from Fitchburg State in 1968, and her master's degree in education in 1972. Prior to that, she earned a nursing degree from Beth Israel Hospital in Boston.

II. Shirley Pick's Letter to President Antonucci

71 Ellis Street
Fitchburg, MA 01420
October 15, 2003

Dr. Robert Antonucci
Fitchburg State College
160 Pearl Street
Fitchburg, MA 01420

Dear Dr. Antonucci:

Dr. Fallon has informed me of your recent meeting regarding our proposal to develop a program for senior education at Fitchburg State College. We are gratified by your positive response. It gives us an incentive to explore with others of like mind the feasibility of establishing an adult learning institute here in Fitchburg. Similar programs, under the aegis of continuing education, are thriving at other area colleges such as WISE at Assumption, HILR at Harvard, and BALI and Brandeis.

As an alumna of Fitchburg State, I take particular interest in my alma mater and support your commitment to strengthen community outreach. Dr. Fallon and I sense that with a growing senior population in the Montachusett area this is an opportune time to introduce a learning in retirement program.

In the coming weeks we expect to form a working committee to further this exciting prospect. We will keep you informed of our progress. Thank you for your interest and encouragement.

Sincerely,



Shirley Pick

III. REFLECTIONS

An Address given on May 12, 2009
at Fitchburg State
by Shirley Pick
at the 5th Anniversary Celebration
of the Founding of ALFA

It's really wonderful to see you all here celebrating ALFA's 5th Anniversary. Personally, I want to thank each and every one of you – people of ALFA, instructors, Fitchburg State – for enriching my life and for making this such a special day.

When I grow up, I'm going to be a sparkling, scintillating speaker who will amuse you with jokes and funny stories. But since that hasn't happened so far, I will simply share my recollections and reflections with you.

It's one thing to have an idea. It's quite another to see it take root and come to fruition. An idea is just a seed unless it comes to rest on fertile ground. And that fertile ground turned out to be Fitchburg State.

Five years ago when the idea for a lifelong learning program was presented to Dr. Robert Antonucci, Fitchburg State's new president, his response was a resounding “YES.” Dr. Shirley Wagner, vice-president of academic affairs, became our liaison with the college and helped prepare the ground for the program. She guided, supported and encouraged us to expand and grow to what ALFA is today.

When I first introduced the idea of lifelong learning to people in the local area, no one I approached had had personal experience with such a program.

When I explained what was involved, I was overwhelmed when everyone responded -- “YES, LET'S DO IT!” And that is when the “I” changed to “WE.”

The “WE” I speak of is the wonderful collaboration of the college and a steadfast and committed group of volunteers. Together we have made ALFA the success it is with our “YES WE CAN” attitude:

We volunteered to form a steering committee and establish ALFA's mission. The original steering committee evolved into an executive board and advisors, and with Phil Fallon as our first president, the seed was firmly planted.

We established committees and ALFA began to branch out to meet growing needs.

NOW --

We devise our curriculum from members' requests and seek out instructors to accommodate those requests. We develop the brochure to reflect our growing offerings.

We then see that brochures are distributed throughout the local area.

We, the volunteers, contribute to ALFA-BITS, our newsletter.

We organize outstanding day trips and events and a provocative “Food for Thought” speaker series. When people were reluctant to end the school year so early, we simply developed our May ALFA Plus Program!!!

From the first, ALFA has been characterized by its upbeat, affirmative, generous and innovative spirit. When a suggestion is made or a need arises, there is, without fail, a volunteer to step in and take hold. ALFA

is a true collaborative effort. That is why it works so well.

ALFA's success is also due to the quality and breadth of its class offerings and to the remarkable people from the college and the community who contribute their talents. The concept of ALFA was new to our instructors just as it was to us. Early on, those instructors who'd had little experience with older adult students could be seen pacing nervously before conducting their first ALFA classes.

One instructor wondered after his first class, “Do you think they like me?” “No-o-o,” came the halting response. “They didn't like you. They simply loved you.”

The instructors have been all we could have hoped for in their preparation, presentation, wealth of information -- and their ability to elicit lively discussion. We certainly enjoy our instructors -- and it seems they enjoy teaching ALFA classes --- because they keep coming back for more!

One thing that has distinguished ALFA from similar programs is that it set out to be welcoming and inclusive. You can count on our class aides and meet and greet people to see to that. The camaraderie that has developed, the good humor, compatibility and caring make ALFA special. We are mindful that people next to us may be shy, lonely, coping with health issues, or have sustained a loss and are grieving. We know that a simple, “Hello, my name is” can brighten and enrich a person's day. People love ALFA for its informality and friendliness --- and an unexpected bonus has been the many fine friendships ALFA has generated.

There is an expression: “If you want a tree to grow, it doesn't help to water the leaves.” So we concentrated on the roots. We have been fortunate to have people willing to pitch in and work hard --- and we have had a good time in the process.

ALFA has succeeded beyond anything we could have envisioned when we began five years ago.

The original seed of an idea met with a favorable response and we have enjoyed the continued generous support of President Antonucci and Dr. Wagner. To them and Fitchburg State --- A big “Thank You.” To all of you who have helped ALFA to prosper and thrive, “Look what we have accomplished!”

IV. OLD KIDS – NEW TRICKS!

ALFA's 3rd Annual Meeting--June 6, 2006

*ALFA passed the 2-year mark,
It started off as a shot in the dark—
And look where we are now!
A little piece of history, if I may
Will explain how ALFA got where it is today—*

*Shirley P. ¹ first roped Phil ². In
When he was out walking his dog, Dylan.
She had an idea she thought might rate
For lifelong learning at Fitchburg State.
A neighborly talk evolved into action;
They tested and weighed for the idea's traction.
Phil ventured forward to his friend, Bob, ³.
Who was just settling in to his new job.
While Shirley P. approached Shirley W. ⁴.
Saying, "Here I am with an idea to trouble you!"
They both said, "Sure!" and "What a great thing!"
So the idea caught on and just took wing.*

1. Shirley Pick – ALFA's Founder
2. Dr. Philip Fallon – ALFA's First President
3. Dr. Robert Antonucci – President of Fitchburg State
4. Dr. Shirley Wagner – Fitchburg State Vice President of Academic Affairs and ALFA Liaison

Shortly, a steering committee was found
To represent the towns around.
It set out to develop the program's frame,
Draft a mission, and choose a name.
Committees took hold and forged ahead
With spirit and zeal, it must be said.
Programs were set and publicity went out
And word of ALFA soon spread about.
ALFA's home base became McKay,
And our fledgling operation was under way.
From just 2 courses ALFA grew,
And now it's sporting quite a few!

Finally, it was time for a board to take over
(ALFA's attempt at an "extreme makeover")—
Original members were feeling blue
And wondered, "What's left for us to do?"
So ALFA devised an unusual scheme—
A board and advisors—and it's worked like a dream!

Instructors signed on who aimed to please
And put their best feet forward with their expertise.
They didn't quite know what they had in store
When a bunch of old kids came through the door.
They taught about the Middle East and global warming,
Mythology, music, and theater performing,
And a host of other subjects, too many to state—
It goes without saying—our instructors are first rate.

*They've kept us challenged and on our toes
And our affection only grows and grows.
To them we offer a word of praise
For the many ways they've enriched our days.*

*Shirley Wagner, many thanks for your reception
And supporting ALFA from its inception;
For keeping our focus straight and true
And helping us see our programs through.
On behalf of ALFA let me say—
We so appreciate this event today.*

*Year 3—and it's clear we're going strong.
Some original members will be moving along
To make way for new folks who will keep things going
And assure that ALFA continues growing!
The appeal and success of the program to date,
And this I cannot overstate,
Rests with the commitment of the people here
Who've been so willing to volunteer.
When we started out, who could have believed
How well the program would be received.*

*We now have a newsletter, ALFA-BITS,
And this spring we sponsored our first ALFA trip.
Our "Food for Thought Series" next fall will debut,
No telling what members will think up to do!*

The prospects are endless when you're young at heart—
Youth may be a "gift of nature,"
But "age is a work of art."
With spirit and gusto and the will to succeed,
You never know where a creative idea may lead.

Thanks to you all for doing your part.
ALFA is off to a very good start.
So let me conclude,
 My history's done.
 Cheers and Congrats—
 It's been a great run!

Karen Pick

V. ALFA GIRL

On the occasion of Shirley Pick being awarded the President's Medal
at the 112th Annual Commencement at Fitchburg State, January 25, 2008.

To the tune of: "I'm Called Little Buttercup" from H.M.S. Pinafore

*Here's to our ALFA girl
That would be my mom, Shirl
Who dreamed up a scheme that was new
Then rallied her forces
To set up some courses
And make her idea come true...*

*She scoped out a need
And she planted a seed
And it landed on choice fertile ground.
The seed it took root
And you're seeing the fruit
As the prospects for ALFA abound.*

*Shirl had lots of help
From the college itself
And from folks who shared in her idea,
And from offerings two
Now to twenty-five grew
As we head into ALFA's fifth year.*

*We have speakers and field trips
Our newsletter ALFA-BITS
The momentum continues to mount.
From one little thought
Oh, the things you have wrought
This honor takes into account.*

*Now we're here to celebrate
ALFA and Fitchburg State
And the wonderful things you have done.
It proves once again
With support from your friends
The incredible "power of one!"*

*So—here's to our ALFA girl
Clever, creative Shirl
Who dreamed up a scheme that was new
Then rallied her forces
To set up some courses
And Voila! Her idea has come true.*

Karen Pick

VI. Fitchburg State Instructors—Current and Retired

Rachel Boersma	Catherine Humphreys	Daniel Sarefield
George Bohrer	Maria Jaramillo	Thomas Schoenfeld
Eric Budd	Brian Kelly	Harry Semerjian
Bob Champlin	Louis Lorenzen	Joshua Spero
Sylvia Charland	Paul Luria	Natalie Stassen
Rod Christy	John McGrail	Fred Sullivan
Christine Dee	George Miller	Robert Tapply
Jane Fiske	Jana Morgan	Edmund Thomas
Elaine Francis	Kelly Morgan	Theresa Fava Thomas
Norman Fredette	Frank Morrison	Michael Turk
Jeffrey Godin	Suzanne Owens	Shirley Wagner
Cheryl Groeneveld	John Paul	Stephen Wall-Smith
Michael Hoberman	Chris Picone	Paul Speiser
Gunter Hoos	Ben Railton	Susan Williams

VII. Non-Fitchburg State Instructors

Bea Adams	Anna Clementi	David Gordon
Joseph Addante	Bob Cole	Bruce Goyette
Gail Allo	Joy Contois	Roland Green
Bill Ayadi	Lucille Cormier	Margi Hadorn
Chris Barnacoat	Kathie Cowan	Michelle Hanson
Winnie Beasley	Janet Cragin	Wayne Hazen
Danielle Beaudette	Sally Cragin	Sally Hens
Robert Bellefeuille	Karen Crowder	Joyce Hinckley
Anna Bishop	Ned Daniels	Beverly Hollows
Simone Blake	Matthew DeLisle	Alan Horvitz
Art Bonney	Michelle Drury	Elaine Hupfeld
Jean Borgatti	Kristina Durocher	Stephen Jasperson
Carol Bosworth	Bob Egan	Carol Cali Kearns
Donna Caruso	Philip Fallon	Sonia Khoury
Deborah Cary	Sheryl Farnam	Walter Kondig
Susan Cashman	Alexander Farquharson	Arthur Koykka
Marita Cauthen	Debra Faust-Clancy	Mike Kressy
Sharon Chandler	Kathy Flynn	George Lane
Mary Chapin Durling	Edmund Frederick	Sandra Lawson
Joe Choiniere	Patricia Frederick	Michael Leamy
Paul Christopher	Ming Gao	Donna Leon
Michael Ciota	Lynn Gerrits	Julie Dunlap LePoer

Mary Ellen Letarte
Judith Lindstedt
Heather Lussier
Lori MacDonald
Jane Maguire
Linda Maguire
Cris Martin
Amanda Mastroianni
James Maybury
Karen McNall
Margarita Merriman
Diane Moore
Beverly Mulholland
Tom Mulholland
Laurie Nehring
Clare O'Brien
Anne O'Connor
Karin Oliveira
Terri Palazzo

Vincent Parisi
Viji Patil
Peder Pedersen
Carol Pedigree
Lorraine Quesada
Raul Quesada
Jonathan Ratila
Susan Roetzer
Joyce Ryan
Judith Sayegh
Thomas Schilling
Donalyn Schofield
John Sheedy
Paula Skehan
Alma Bella Solis
Marc Speiser
William Stevenson
Dave Svens

Steve Swartz
Bonnie Sweatman
Gare Thompson
Shuneet Thomson
DeAnne Thorn
Sally Tracy
Richard Trott
Floyd Truitt
Joe Turner
Lisa Webb
Alice Welch
Jack Wertheimer
Ingrid Wheeler
Chet Williamson
Jim Woovis
Mr. Xia
Elliott Zide
Brenda Zolli

With appreciation to
our talented ALFA instructors!

This history, which traces ALFA's origins and evolution, is both a tribute to our founder, Shirley Pick, and a testament to the spirit and dedication of the many Fitchburg State and community people who participated in ALFA's creation and continue to advance its mission and champion its successes.

