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The Spiral

Twenty Years of Service for Aiken's Senior Community

September, 2010

A Look Back at the Academy's Founding as We Celebrate Our Twentieth Anniversary

The 2010/2011 academic year marks the twentieth anniversary of the Aiken Academy for Lifelong Learning's first full year of operation. As this milestone is reached, our members might be interested in the events that led to the founding of the Academy.

In the summer of 1989 the dreams of three individuals merged and began to take shape. Ida Crawford Stewart, then Vice President of Estee Lauder, Inc., is a native of South Carolina and a former resident of Aiken. She expressed the strong belief that people of all ages should continue to maximize their individual potential. To further this belief, she established an irrevocable trust at the University of South Carolina-Aiken (USCA) to create a Chair in the Department of Sociology in Gerontology.

Dr. Robert Alexander, Chancellor of USCA at that time, agreed with Mrs. Stewart and asked Dr. Mary Leslie Hudson, then Dean of Continuing Education at USCA, and Dr. Trudy Henson, then Chair of the Sociology Department at USCA, to present a plan by which USCA could serve the rapidly growing population of older persons within the university's service area.

Into this scene came Dr. Earl F. Kauffman who, at the age of 82 years, was seeking a new challenge. Dr. Kauffman had served for 25 years on the faculty of the University of Kentucky (U.K.), during which he organized the Council on Aging at U.K. Following his retirement from U.K., he continued to work on behalf of the elderly and organized the Community Activity Program at Hawthorne-at-Leesburg, an adult community in central Florida. Upon his arrival in Aiken, he held a series of conferences with leaders serving older persons in the Aiken area. From these

meetings he recruited members for a planning committee to develop and implement a program for the community's mature residents. Working under the direction of Dr. Kauffman, this committee, composed of mature learners from the Aiken community, formulated a mission statement for what was to become the Academy for Lifelong Learning: "To provide opportunities for men and women to get the most out of their lives." By late January of 1990 the Academy was ready to offer opportunities for people sixty years of age and older to come back to school "to learn without having to take tests".

January 22, 1990 was the inaugural meeting of the Aiken Academy for Lifelong Learning. Dr. Warner Montgomery, editor of the *Star Reporter* in Columbia, SC., spoke before more than 300 persons at the Etheredge Center on the USCA campus. Dr. Montgomery's topic was "Preparing for the Next Century --The Maturity Spiral", a discussion of the pace of change in our society.

In the ensuing months interested members formed focus groups to identify projects of major interest to Academy members. A monthly newsletter was established to provide news about programs, members, and special USCA resources and events. *The Maturity Spiral*, taken from the title of Dr. Montgomery's January address, was chosen as the name for the newsletter, as it seemed to capture the rhythm and meaning of the Academy program. In 1997 the name of the newsletter was shortened to *The Spiral*.

In 1990/1991, the first full academic year of operation, the Aiken Academy for Lifelong Learning attracted 125 members who attended more than 25 forums, field visits, and special events.

Dr. Kauffman served as Director of the Academy until his death, shortly after the beginning of the

Academy's initial Fall term, on October 19, 1990, having successfully established the Academy that was to continue his dream. Every April, the Academy presents the Earl F. Kauffman Award in his honor, to recognize a group or individual that has provided outstanding contributions to the Academy.

By 1993 interest in the Academy had grown rapidly and there were requests to lower the age at which people might join. Responding to this interest, the Board of Regents acted to formalize 55 years as the minimum age for membership. In 1997, the Board of Regents removed the numerical limit and formalized "mature adult" as the age requirement for membership.

In the ensuing years, Academy membership has grown to over 300 seniors from Aiken and nearby communities. The current catalog lists 20 short courses covering a variety of themes such as politics, science, religion, law, health, literature, and leisure pursuits, plus two special events for Academy members, and this is in the Fall semester alone.

Academy members can be proud of this heritage, and with the help of our dedicated volunteers, can be sure that it will continue to extend into the future.