



Spring Semester for Seniors

WRITTEN BY MARY NEWMAN ON FEBRUARY 18, 2014
POSTED IN NEWS WEST SIDE SPIRIT.



The orientation and class sign up for Sundays at JASA, a program that offers college level courses for seniors 55 and older, is a bit like the first day of class in grade school – dozens of seniors socializing, discussing current events over coffee, and catching up with friends they hadn't seen since last semester. The program was started thirty one years ago by the Board of Trustees at JASA (Jewish Association Serving the Aging). They felt that other senior centers were only providing activities Monday through Friday, and the weekends were very tough for seniors who

were alone, and didn't have any family to visit.

Program Directory Sara Tornay explained the importance of offering college level courses to seniors. "JASA offers a way of developing some social relationships. It is a way of keeping the mind active, which shows every year to be more and more important in keeping people alive longer, and healthier."

The teachers were given the opportunity to introduce themselves and their classes at the program orientation at John Jay College on West 59th St, where the classes are held each Sunday. The room overflowed with so many interested students that people were forced to share seats and stand in the doorway.

Ed Sommerfeld is teaching two classes this semester



“One of the things I think is a misconception of getting older is that older people aren’t doing anything,” student Myrna Tarnower said. “I have found, to my amazement that we have more energy and interests than a lot of young people.” She said “this was something that I found out for myself here at JASA.”

In the three decades of offering classes to seniors, JASA has developed a community full of interesting people. Ed Sommerfeld, formerly an agent at William Morris Talent Agency, is teaching two classes this semester. Some of his past clients included the likes of Don Rickles, Rodney Dangerfield, Milton Berle, Robert Klein, Buddy Hackett, Joan Rivers, Alan King, Red Buttons, and Billy Crystal. His class ‘Can We Talk!’ is comedy focused and offers seniors the opportunity to share their life experiences, careers, future plans, and concerns in a humorous environment. “I think [the program] gives [seniors] a place to go where they feel comfortable. You hear the cliché ‘a home away from home’ but there is a lot of truth to that here,” Sommerfeld said.

The spring semester offers 30 courses, and runs from February 16th – May 18th. Students can choose from a diverse list of classes that includes topics on current events, yoga, art history, creative writing, language courses, and learning to use a computer. The acting and creative writing classes give presentations of their work at the end of the semester as well.

Jane Marsh is another lively character found at JASA each Sunday. She teaches a course on opera, and works as the artistic and program director at the Metropolitan Opera Guild. Marsh is an international opera singer herself, and her class will offer students a behind-the-scenes look as they study the spring performances at the Met this season.

“Everyone needs a reason to get up in the morning; I get to provide that reason with my enthusiasm,” said Marsh.

For more information about Sundays at JASA, please contact program director Sara Tornay at 212-273-5304.