

Communication Revelation

It's never too late to learn a new language — area residents take advantage of non-credit courses

BY JOHN DUNPHY

BUON GIORNO! For area residents heading toward or already in retirement, opportunities for more travel may mean they would like to bone up on the language of whatever country they might be visiting. It might mean an opportunity to learn the “mother tongue” of their ancestors. Or it might simply mean a chance to learn something new now that the kids are moved out of the house.

Here, residents have options. At the Princeton Adult School, young and young-at-heart alike have been offered a wealth of non-credit courses for over 70 years in a multitude of subject matters, from cooking to art appreciation to foreign language.

Alessandra Mazzucato, chairwoman of the language committee at the school, whose classes are mostly held at Princeton High School in Princeton, notes how the program's language options have grown over the years. “We started with a few languages,” says Ms. Mazzucato, who has been with the school for more than 30 years and previously taught Italian courses. “Spanish, Italian, German. But now we are teaching Arabic, Chinese, we've offered Hebrew as well.”

In addition to different languages being offered, different levels have been added throughout, allowing for interested parties to go deep into a country's language and culture. “We had to offer four Spanish I courses in the fall semester, there were so many students.”

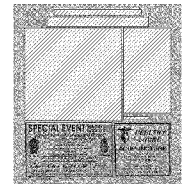
Hillsborough resident Gilda McCauley has taken a number of Italian courses at Princeton Adult School, including several with Ms. Mazzucato. She is currently taking an Italian civilization course.

In her 60s, Ms. McCauley says she first became interested in Italian during the 1980s. “I was born in

Italy,” she says. “We came here when I was 2. We always spoke Italian at home but I was never able to take it as a language course, either in high school or in college.”

When Ms. McCauley and her family returned to Italy for a visit with relatives, “I realized I could understand everything but my grammar was terrible,” she says.

Ms. McCauley has been taking courses through Princeton Adult School for more than 15 years. “It is a great program and it has helped me a great deal,” she says. “If your children are



grown and you are looking at or are retired, then you have the time to do it. People may have had a desire to do it before, but when you reach a certain age you say, 'OK, now it's time.' ”

Carol Clark agrees. As the director of continuing studies at Mercer County Community College in West Windsor, Ms. Clark says about half of the students who sign up for non-credit courses at the school are over 50 and wanting to try something new. “As you get older, you work harder and try to savor what you are learning so you do tend to get more out of it,” she says.

Non-credit languages being offered in the spring semester at the college include standards like Italian and Spanish as well as sign language, Chinese and Arabic. As is the case with the language classes offered at Princeton Adult School, non-credit language courses at Mercer County Community College range in time from eight to 10 weeks.

At Princeton Adult School, prices vary from \$65 to \$90, whereas at Mercer County Community College, and at other non-credit programs in other community colleges, prices tend to be a little higher, in the \$175 range.

Ms. Clark notes all teachers at the college, whether teaching non-credit or credit courses, are current, salaried professors. “They always have to have a degree. Most, I would say 80 percent of them, have a master’s degree or higher. And they are entrenched in their fields.”

Another benefit for seniors, categorized as those 65 years and older, is they can participate tuition-free in classes at the college on a space-available basis. For Mercer County Community College, students have to live in-county to take advantage of this, however most county college’s offer a similar program.

Courses at Princeton Adult School are offered for a lower rate, as the overhead is lower. Teachers are given a stipend, rather than a salary. “We’re paid very little,” Ms. Mazzucato says. “Teachers...always say it is so rewarding to teach here. The people who come here are interesting people. They really want to be here.”

Over the course of her teaching and administration career at Princeton Adult School, Ms. Mazzucato has noticed a steady rise in the amount of attendees over 50. “They live longer and better.”

Ms. Mazzucato also points to those over 50 wanting and able to travel more and those looking to learn the language of business partners. “They want more, more, more,” she says. “More culture, more information and the teachers who are willing to give their time, even if the pay is very little, there is enthusiasm on both sides. You feel it.”

Ms. McCauley has felt the enthusiasm, and has continued to take advantage of the classes available at Princeton Adult School. Whether it is to recapture a lost heritage, to travel or to simply “do it because they love languages,” learning a new language — over 50 or at any age — is a very good way to spend your time.

“I think just to be able to learn a new language is a very rewarding experience,” Ms. Clark says. “If you’re talking about a language spoken around you and you feel satisfaction being able to communicate and understand the people you come across, it’s very rewarding.”

“You worked all your life, it’s nice now to be able to see and experience things after you’ve worked,” she adds. ●

For more information about language courses offered at Princeton Adult School, visit princetonadultschool.org or call 609-683-1101; for information about non-credit language courses offered at Mercer County Community College, visit mccc.edu or call Carol Clark at 609-586-4800, ext. 3856.

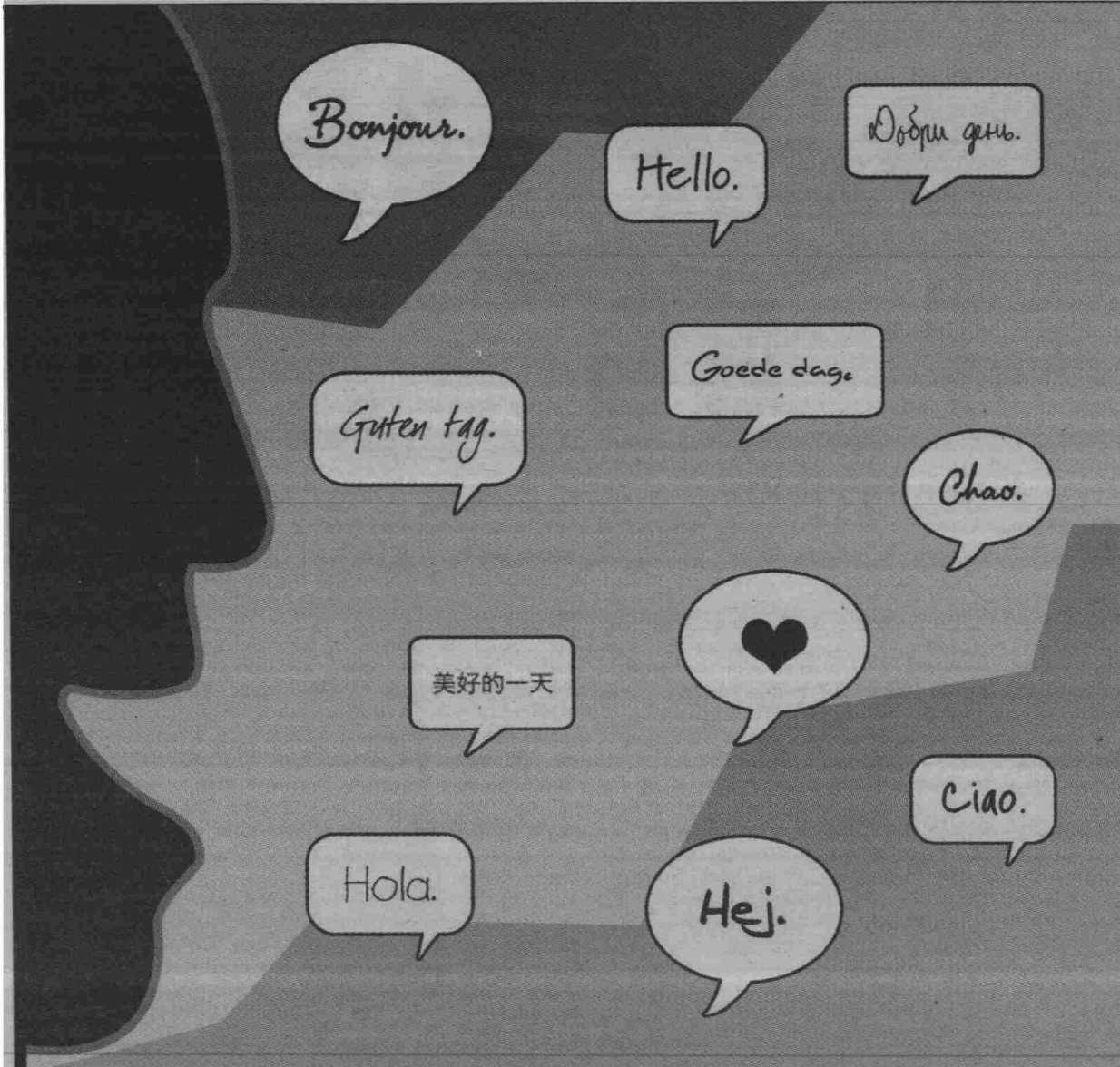


Illustration by Kira Hadalski