



## Virtual Senior Academy gives local seniors engaging, easy and free online platform for lifelong learning

By Gina Mazza  
For *Pittsburgh Senior News*

Have you always wanted to study a particularly intriguing topic, dabble in different types of art, or experience being part of a fascinating book discussion group?

Now you can do this (and much more) from the comfort of your home or with a group of friends at your

local senior center through the Jewish Healthcare Foundation's Virtual Senior Academy. This online program connects adults ages 50 and older in and around the Pittsburgh region through live interactive courses offered every week—and it's all free. No prior computer experience is necessary. All you need is a computer with

Internet access and a webcam (which is typically built into the computer monitor, so no separate equipment is needed).

"It's an fun way to make new friends who share your interests, enjoy lifelong learning and become comfortable with technology

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### Do you need help with Caregiving?

• Visit our website at [Pittsburghseniornews.com](http://Pittsburghseniornews.com) to view our 2018 *Allegheny County Senior Resource Guide*

• Turn to the Allegheny County Area Agency on Aging for assistance. Download a copy of their caregiver guide at [alleghenycounty.us/Human-Services/About/Offices/Area-Agency-on-Aging.aspx](http://alleghenycounty.us/Human-Services/About/Offices/Area-Agency-on-Aging.aspx).

### Do you have an event to share?

If you would like us to publicize an event in Allegheny County, send information by the 10th day of the month prior. All submissions will be reviewed and every effort will be made to run qualified submissions if page space is available. All submissions should be emailed to [pghseniornews@icloud.com](mailto:pghseniornews@icloud.com).

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all at the same time,” says program manager Mara Leff.

The platform launched in August 2016 after a small beta-test. “We met with local seniors who agreed to pilot the software and give us feedback to ensure that it’s senior-friendly,” Mara explains. Since August, more than 300 people have participated in the classes, and more are signing up every week. “We have a partnership with the Department of Human Services Area Agency on Aging, so you can go to any DHS/AAA senior center and participate in the classes in a group setting. The classes are actually part of senior centers’ regular programming.”

“I felt elated for days after participating in the book discussion,” one recent participant expressed. “The chair yoga class was a hoot! I did the movements right in my living room in front of my computer,” another added.

The live learning experience is made possible through Zoom, a widely used video chat software that is easy to download and safe to use on any device. The software offers a simple screen that displays your personal schedule of classes, and enables participants to see each other during the calls. The classes typically take place on Monday through Friday between the hours of 10 a.m. and 3 p.m.

Virtual Senior Academy offers a broad range of topics in order to appeal to as many older adults as possible. Subjects include health and wellness, fitness, history and culture,



arts and music, book clubs, current events and much more. Some of the recent classes included African dance fitness, Warhol and the Kennedys, “glass fish” glass art and a discussion of the book *The Buddha in the Attic* by Julie Otsuka.

“A few of our most popular classes are the monthly book club led by a woman from the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh and our culinary classes like our tour of Italy class,” Mara comments. Other recent offerings were an introduction to art history, how to manage COPD, a virtual exhibit tour of the Andy Warhol Museum, how to manage your blood pressure hosted by the American

Heart Association, watercolor painting for beginners, and an introduction to the Nationality Rooms at the University of Pittsburgh.

Class facilitators are regular community members of all ages who are interested and excited to share their passion and knowledge with other Pittsburghers. The program currently has more than 50 instructors and the Foundation is always looking for new facilitators to present engaging content to the participants.

In fact, on the Virtual Senior Academy website, signups for class facilitators are accepted. Perhaps you have something that you’re passionate or



knowledgeable about and would appreciate an opportunity to teach and share it. There is an option to lead a one-time class or an ongoing course. It doesn't have to be something that you have a degree or known expertise in. It can be something such as your deep knowledge of Pittsburgh sports teams or music from various eras in history. Facilitators receive one-on-one training with a member of the Academy staff and in-person assistance with their first class. Serving as a facilitator is done on a voluntary basis and is unpaid.

So if you're looking to expand your knowledge or experience about a topic (or a whole host of topics) or are searching for an outlet to share your talents, consider joining with Virtual Senior Academy as a student or a teacher. *PSN*

To learn more, call (412) 594-2579, email [help@virtualsenioracademy.org](mailto:help@virtualsenioracademy.org) or visit [Virtualsenioracademy.org](http://Virtualsenioracademy.org).

### Classes Every Week

Connect online to take interactive group classes using video chat software. The Virtual Senior Academy offers Pittsburgh based classes every week.



### Variety of Topics

Participate in live classes or help facilitate a class on an area of personal interest or passion.

### Easy to Use

Easy to use platform. No prior computer experience needed. All you need is access to a computer with internet and a webcam.

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