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Grand Forum: Grand Valley's Newest Program

David H. Seibold

Grand Valley State College opened its doors in 1963 for 228 students, most of whom had yet to reach the age of majority. Last fall, Grand Valley State University offered to 30 students, all of whom had reached the age of seniority, a new educational outreach program sponsored by the Office of Continuing Education for those who are 55 or older: Grand Forum.

Grand Forum is the dream-child of Mary Buckmaster, who grew up and was familiar with the Chautauqua Movement in upstate New York and later worked for the Grand Rapids Council for the Humanities. Mary discussed her idea with friends Sally and Bill Seidman, the latter of whom was one of the founders of Grand Valley State College and its first Chair of the Board of Control. The Seidmans passed the idea on to President Don Lubbers, who spoke to Cal Stockman, Director of Continuing Education. His division heartily agreed to sponsor the program. Mary was asked to direct this new program and to garner prospective members.

The earliest members chose the curriculum for the program, by agreeing upon subjects they would like to know more about and then finding experts, many from GVSU, who would agree to present lectures and lead discussions. There would be ten or twelve sessions in each season. In order to keep the tuition at \$95 for the year's course, the Seidman Family Foundation, Meijer, and some of the members made contributions. The planners struggled to select a fitting name for the program. One thing was certain: it would not have any words like "senior," "mature," or "retirees." The simple "Forum," the choice of most, would not do, since Grand Valley has a staff newspaper with that name. In the end, they agreed on Grand Forum, which seemed to embody the intent and high purpose of the organization, without announcing that you had to have a few years behind you before you could join the group.

As our brochure states, Grand Forum "allows its members to broaden their horizons while developing an appreciation for knowledge of new or familiar subjects." Accordingly, the fall session began with a talk on "Issues Facing the U.S." by William Seidman, former chair of the FDIC. Other memorable sessions were offered by GVSU professors: Jonathan White, Director of the School of Criminal Justice, on "International Terrorism"; Professor Ivo Soljan of the English Department on "Understanding the Bosnian Civil War"; and Emeritus Professor of Physics Daniel Andersen on "Our Universe: From the Earth Out," followed by a visit to the Chaffee Planetarium. Although most of the sessions were held at Eberhard Center, some of them, like the latter, included traveling to a site for direct observation: e.g., the Van Andel Museum for "The Native American Indian" and "Traditions of Furniture Making in Grand Rapids"; to Lake Michigan for a cruise and lecture on the GVSU research vessel "*D.J. Angus*"; the Meijer Botanical Gardens for a talk on the garden sculptures

by Frederick Meijer; and Grand Haven's Scriptorium for a view of a unique collection of early bibles and other manuscripts, as well as an actual handling of 4,000 year old cuneiform tablets. Grand Forum members were also included in the International Conference on Global Competitiveness sponsored by the Seidman School of Business and featuring a talk by former Vice-President Dan Quayle.

Grand Forum has grown in one year from 30 to over 100 members, and the 1996/97 year promises to be as exciting and challenging as the first year. We look forward to such lecture/discussions as that with Ben Rudolph, Chair of the Marketing Department in the Seidman School of Business, on "America's Relationship with Countries of the Pacific Basin"; and with GVSU Professor of Anthropology Jan Brashler and Calvin College Professor of History Bert De Vries on "Crossroads of the Middle East in the Ancient World." Trips planned are to the Allendale campus to see *Twelfth Night* and hear the eminent scholar David Bevington, Professor of English and Comparative Literature at the University of Chicago; the Harvey Lemmen Collection on Lincoln and the Civil War in the Seidman House; and to Muskegon Lake for a tour on the new GVSU Water Resource Institute research vessel, the *W. G. Jackson*.

The season will begin, as it did last year, with what is likely to become a popular tradition: a wine and cheese party at the Meadows Golf Club with entertainment by Art Hills and his Dixieland Band. Art, also a member of Grand Forum, is a former Executive Assistant to the President at GVSU.

Grand Forum provides a way to return to the classroom for those who no longer have to worry about choosing a profession or preparing to enter it. Because they have fewer distractions, and the clock is only a general reference, they have time to approach old challenges with a renewed and relaxed open-mindedness. They have time to let the enormity of the universe seep into their beings, to ponder the warps and tangles of history, and to wonder at the mysteries of the world. And it is only proper that a university reach out with such an educational program to so many eager students.