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## State's water infrastructure and politics to be discussed during Jan. 10 info session

By Lou Fancher

Lifetime learners and people who care about California's water supply will not want to miss the OLLI @Berkeley Info Session held Jan. 10 at the Lafayette Library. OLLI, the jolly moniker that's an acronym for UC Berkeley's Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, is known to offer unique, rigorous, education courses to people age 50 and older. In eight locations in Berkeley and at the Lafayette Library, 2,800 members join approximately 75 faculty to explore over 100 courses that include modified medical school-level classes on the brain, creative writing, history, contemporary politics, film, music and art appreciation, and more. During the free information session in Lafayette, staff and faculty will present highlights of the membership program and preview upcoming courses. Feature Speaker Richard Walker, professor emeritus of geography at UC Berkeley and director of the Living New Deal project, will delve into multiple aspects of the state's water infrastructure and politics in a presentation titled, "California Water Ward in the Age of Climate Change."

Expect Walker to set off ideological fireworks. During a nearly 40-year career at Cal and as author/co-author of six nonfiction books - including his near opus published in 2018 on the environmental impact in the Bay Area of tech-driven Silicon Valley, "Pictures of a Gone City: Tech and the Dark Side of Prosperity in the San Francisco Bay Area" - Walker has developed powerful and arguably, politically volatile perspectives.

"California water has been badly mismanaged for a century-and-a-half," he says. "The system is a total patchwork of water rights all slapped on top of each other. Everybody sticks their pipe in the water figuring they can take as much as they want."

Walker insists the problems existed long before people heard of climate change. California's inflexible water infrastructure doesn't allow adequate adjustments during droughts is one example. Compounding the problem, continued overdrafts drawn from groundwater and rivers is wasted when used on low-value agriculture, like hay, or homeowners' lawns. "I'll start the talk by saying we have the most magnificent water transfer and storage system. But we believe a marvelous physical structure can solve our problems and it can't. We can only do that by wisely allocating and rationing our water."

Walker will conclude with clarification about an issue foremost on people's minds: wildfires. "Water management and wildfires have almost nothing to do with each other," he says. "Trump tweeted during the Camp Fire that if California managed its water properly, it would have less wildfires. The administration is trying to do an end run around state policy and just expand supply." Walker says raising water levels in dams, a solution suggested by the Trump administration and others, can have only trivial effect. "The confusion about water policy is enormous," he adds. "It's a constant uphill battle by sensible people to get California to revolutionize its water policy."

Delivering his message to an army of actual and future OLLI members might be clever strategy. "They're prime material for learning," says Walker, who will during the next semester lead a course, "The Living New Deal: Remarkable Past, Possible Future."

"They have time to take classes, they love to learn and have lively minds. They want more than a passive class. They're lovers of history, politically astute, and want courses that speak to the present."

OLLI Operations Manager Lisa Hardy says members are curious and appreciate learning in a social setting. Faculty are experts in their fields, able to offer breadth and depth. Courses that limit size to allow greater one-on-one interaction between faculty and members tend to sell out within hours of registration opening. Hardy admits, the greatest challenge other than finding venues is "meeting the incredible demands of Bay Area members eager to learn."

Enthusiasm for hands-on learning explains why among the most popular OLLI courses are writing, international current affairs, history and cultural appreciation. Walker's New Deal class integrates all of those features and offers a citizen science-style opportunity, in addition to the regular classroom curriculum. Students will first study the New Deal that was launched by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1933, largely in response to the Great Depression. The New Deal continued until America entered the Second World War in 1942 and had four primary components: economic recovery, job creation, investment in public works and active citizenship aimed at the common good.

During the semester, students will learn about the role they might play in the Living New Deal project, of which Walker is director and a board member. Designed like a scavenger hunt, participants countrywide are invited to document and submit to a growing project database their encounters with New Deal public works, printed materials and photographs. Walker says, "The New Deal built things and employed people from all corners of the country. To lift the country up, it had to do that. Likewise, it's important that our Living New Deal as it is constructed has an economic foundation in terms of training and structure, but also a moral, or ethical, higher purpose. We're sorely lacking the idea that government is meant for everyone and to help the whole country."

Other OLLI classes beginning in January include "The Genius of Bach" with Stephen Schultz; "Our Brains: Molecules to Memory Part 2" with Peter Ralston; "The Silver Age of Russian Culture" with Elena Sheygal-Placzek; "Country Music" with Pete Elman; and more.

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