
The Midcoast Inquirer

Newsletter of Midcoast Senior College
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Jack Thompson

Remembering Jack

Mark C. Smith

On March 6, 2017, Midcoast Senior College lost a founder, a professor, and its biggest booster. I lost a friend. Jack Thompson was a man of many facets, many skills and many achievements. He is a difficult man to capture in words. One of those words, however, would be "good." Jack was a good man.

In 1999, Jack Thompson and Nancy Wheeler were taking classes and teaching at Olli (Osher Lifelong Learning Institute) in Portland. Olli was the first senior college in Maine and was under the umbrella of the University of Southern Maine, an arrangement typical of senior colleges.

After discussions Jack and Nancy had with David Batty, Director of the Midcoast extension campus of the University of Maine Augusta, and Jack's colleague from Olli, Rabbi Harry Sky, a decision was made to host an Open House in October 1999 to introduce plans to begin senior classes in the Brunswick/Bath area the following March, and to gauge interest. The planning group expected about 25 people, but over 80 showed up. More donuts and cider were sent for, and the meeting was repeated in three rooms. This incident forecast the continuous growth we have experienced since our founding, a growth that has regularly exceeded expectations.

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Mission Statement of the Midcoast Inquirer:

The Midcoast Inquirer articulates the academic spirit and educational mission of Midcoast Senior College to offer lifelong learning for older adults. To this end, we provide a bulletin board that announces course offerings, lectures and special events, and a literary forum (or virtual classroom) of essays, reviews, interviews and commentaries written by faculty and students.

--Robert C. Williams, Editor

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The initial MSC semester began in March of 2000, with six courses. Jack, the first Chair of the Curriculum Committee, taught Maine Experiences, Highlights and Lowlights. The fact that this subject was outside Jack's academic field (Russian History) was an early indication of his wide ranging intellectual interests. Our most prolific professor, Jack would teach twenty-five classes in the first fifteen years of MSC. The following sample of



his courses reflects Jack's expansive interests and expertise: Tsars, Peasants, Rebels, Russia's Imperial Past; FDR and the Transformation of America 1933-45; From 9/11 to Iraq's Withdrawal: What Went Wrong; Espionage in Fact, Fiction and Film; Tudor Monarchs, Henry, Elizabeth and Other Rascals and Eight Women Who Changed the World.

Jack's imprint on MSC can also be seen in two pivotal moments of our history. The first was the initial Board retreat in 2004. Held in Jack's barn in Phippsburg, that retreat

confirmed our mission and commitment to providing academic liberal arts courses.

David McKeith, long time Board member and participant in the retreat, speaks of Jack's true belief in and commitment to the liberal arts. Jack's vision was instrumental in the mission of Midcoast Senior College. The second pivotal moment was the decision to leave the umbrella of University of Maine-- Augusta and become an independent 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. Jack was a member of the committee formed in 2010 to

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