

lifelong learning by Robin Hartill | Community Editor

Plymouth Harbor residents go back to school

The educational pilot program with SILL uses technology to broadcast college-level lectures to residents.

For years, Martha "Marty" Buenneke heard about the Sarasota Institute of Lifelong Learning. Until recently, the Plymouth Harbor resident never attended a program in the college-level lecture series, because she doesn't drive.

But since Jan. 8, Buenneke and approximately 100 other residents of Plymouth Harbor have attended SILL's Thursday "Global Issues" lectures without leaving their retirement community, thanks to

a new pilot program in which Access Sarasota simulcasts the lectures to Pilgrim Hall at Plymouth Harbor. Buenneke has attended every Thursday lecture since

more info

SARASOTA INSTITUTE OF LIFETIME LEARNING

Call: 365-6404

Web site: www.sill-sarasota.org

then, participating in programs such as "The Impact of Globalization on the U.S. Economy" and "North and South Korea: Can This Divorced Couple Ever Get Together Again?"

"It's heavy-duty stuff," Buenneke said. "I'm extremely glad that it's available."

According to Dr. Margaret Bates, a Plymouth Harbor resident and SILL adjunct board member, a number of Plymouth Harbor residents faithfully have attended the lecture series, which runs from January through March, for many years. In February 2008, SILL board



Plymouth Harbor resident and SILL volunteer **Bob Sessions** hands a program to **Susanne Bolan**.

members met with several Plymouth Harbor officials, including Bates, to discuss the possibility of expanding access to the programs. SILL was especially interested in expanding its Thursday lectures, which have sold out at its 525-seat venue at Sarasota Players Theatre for the past three years.

"We were attracting so many people to the Players Theatre," Bates said. "There

was constant waiting in line."

During that meeting, officials from SILL and Plymouth Harbor decided they would use technology to simulcast the lectures. Plymouth Harbor later decided to hire Access Sarasota for the programming and absorbed the \$1,000-per-lecture cost of the pilot program.

According to Gordon Okawa, director of community relations at Plymouth

Harbor, Access Sarasota films the lectures, which are converted to digital format.

"It's no different than Web streaming," Okawa said.

The lectures appear at a 15-second delay on a laptop computer, which is hooked up to a broadband line that connects to the screen.

Toward the end of each program, Okawa collects attendees' questions about the lectures and e-mails them to a SILL representative for the question-and-answer segment.

The lectures have been popular with residents, who enjoy learning from top experts in international relations.

"They've been very favorably accepted," Bates said.

The program has also returned SILL to its roots, Okawa said. Plymouth Harbor resident Dr. Evelyn Duvall founded SILL in 1972, after attending the first White House Conference on Aging. She returned from that conference convinced that senior citizens need as much exercise for their minds as they need for their bodies.

Okawa hopes that Plymouth Harbor can expand its use of simulcast technology, possibly broadcasting theater productions or college lectures. He said other local retirement communities are considering broadcasting SILL's programs, as well. According to Okawa, the idea of lifelong learning is one that is increasingly important in retirement communities.

"Living at a retirement community isn't about just sitting in front of a TV," Okawa said.