

ARTS & CULTURE

Art, music, dance classes offer seniors free creative outlets

By Jada Ojii, Daily Memphian

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Paulette Neal (center) is among the residents of Raleigh's Northlake Apartments taking an art class presented by Creative Aging on Wednesday, Aug. 16, 2023. (Mark Weber/The Daily Memphian)

Creative Aging, an organization providing creative outlets for Mid-South senior citizens, is celebrating 20 years of service this fall.

From art and crafts opportunities to piano, drum and dance classes, Creative Aging offers seniors free ways to express their creativity and discover new hobbies.

Creative Aging also brings music performances to local senior communities and nursing homes throughout the year. Additionally, the organization hosts a concert series in collaboration with Theatre Memphis, with tickets ranging from \$5 to \$7.50.

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With 10 events scheduled this year, the next event of Creative Aging's concert series will be the "Swingtime Explosion Big Band" show on Wednesday, Sept. 6.

Meryl Klein founded the organization in 2003 after studying gerontology in years prior, seeking to follow "her dream of bringing music and the arts to seniors who were no longer able to leave their homes or communities."

Klein retired in 2017.

Creative Aging brings in and pays artists and instructors to lead its programs.

"That's really important because first of all, as a practical matter, people who are artists need to earn a living just like everybody else," Mia Henley, Creative Aging's executive director, said. "But second, Creative Aging, by connecting so many artists and musicians with seniors, is really helping drive the local arts-and-culture economy."

Arts programs for seniors nurture creativity, community

A recent Creative Aging event featured a painting class at Northlake Apartments, a senior apartment complex in Raleigh.

Memphis-based art instructor Sarah Nowlin led the class. In it, a group of residents gathered in the main lobby to learn about art history before attempting their own paintings, with canvases, paint and tools provided.



Creative Aging painting instructor Sarah Nowlin (left) works with residents of Northlake Apartments in Raleigh on Wednesday, Aug. 16, 2023. (Mark Weber/The Daily Memphian)

During the art program at Northlake Apartments, executive director Henley said of the growing bond between attendees, “When I first started coming to this location, this wasn’t happening here. The residents did not know one another. And so coming to performances, coming to classes, helps communities really engage, and helps prevent isolation and loneliness that impacts so many seniors in a very negative way.”



After listening to a presentation about art history, Northlake Apartments residents tried creating their own pictures, with art supplies provided by Creative Aging. (Mark Weber/The Daily Memphian)

Sheila Moore, one of the attendees, described the painting class as “an outlet.”

“I lost my mom, and anything creative I can do to kind of deter me from thinking about that situation and lead me to a brighter light, that’s why I’m here,” she said.

“The atmosphere is so calm and peaceful,” Moore said about learning to decompress through painting. “And it’s giving me a chance to get past the sadness and get into something new.”

[Click here to learn more about Creative Aging.](#)

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