

THE ALIRIAN

November/December 2025



Michael Burns
Chair

Hello ALIRians:

As we move toward the holiday season, there is much going on in your ALIR community. Our facilitator, Willson Donovan, is wrapping his first year, having done an outstanding job of learning and adapting on the fly. His position for ALIR is a part-time one, a change for us, and Willson's com-

mitment to ALIR in addition to his NEISD camp and IT duties makes his care for our community that much more remarkable. We welcomed 66 new ALIRians for the Fall semester, almost all of whom found us through an ALIRian. Thank you for your help in keeping ALIR growing. We are forming an event planning committee, with Julie Nyren in the lead, to better stage our luncheons and events. Please remember that contributions to the ALIR Scholarship Fund are tax deductible, as we move into the end of the year. Launching NEISD seniors into their college years is a special expression of ALIR's lifetime learning commitment.
THANK YOU.

MESSAGE TO ALL ALIRIANS ABOUT SCHOLARSHIPS

The Bill Howland Scholarship Program is a shining star in the ALIR community. Each year the ALIR Scholarship Team awards \$2,500 to several NEISD high school seniors to help with furthering their education. The last two years, ALIR has awarded ten scholarships because of the generosity of our members. This spring, plans are to award another five scholarships totaling \$12,500.

The fund is money donated directly by ALIRians. No money is allocated to this fund from the ALIR general budget. It is time to start building next year's scholarship funds. Here is how to donate: Contact Tom Colburn, tcolbourn@satx.rr.com, to find the best way for you; either by check, cash, or wiring directly from your IRA Required Minimum Distribution which saves you from paying capital gains taxes on your donation.

As Coordinator of the Scholarship Team, I have personally donated several \$2,500 scholarships over the years using the latter method and would be happy to talk to you about how to do it. Representing the Scholarship Team, I encourage each of you to consider donating whatever you can to help these exceptional winners to transition to their next phase of life.

Don Gadberry (210-385-8938), dlgadberry@aol.com.

Coordinator: ALIR Scholarship Team

Members: Estela Royal, Steve Rutledge, Anna Hoelting.



NEISD Superintendent
Dr. Sean Maika
visits ALIRians

NEISD Superintendent Dr. Sean Maika greeted us on October 1 to explain the upcoming November 4, 2025 bond issue. The NEISD Board of Trustees voted on August 11 to call a bond election. If approved by voters, the \$495,000,000 bond would fund projects to address aging infrastructure:

- **Renovating and repairing existing school buildings**
- **Upgrading instructional technology and classroom equipment**
- **Enhancing campus safety and security systems**
- **Improving fine arts, athletics, and extracurricular spaces**

Eligible voters are residents of NEISD.

The proposed bond package was developed following a comprehensive review of district facilities, enrollment trends, and instructional needs. During the 2023-2024 school year, the district partnered with a consultant to conduct a comprehensive facilities assessment including a replacement timeline. Their findings were presented to the Board of Trustees in August of 2024.

In December of 2024, a Facilities Steering Committee of parents, community members, and staff was formed to create a long-range facility plan. Committee members included our ALIR Vice Chair, Linda Comeaux and NEISD Adult and Community Education Executive Director, Dr. Caprica Wells. The Committee met frequently over a six-month period to study data and prioritize projects. Their recommendation was presented to the Board for consideration in June of 2025.

For more information and FAQ, see www.neisd.net/bond2025.

Fall 2025 - Spring 2026 Calendar Dates

Semester Beginning & Ending Dates

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Spring 2026 12-week classes

January 26 - April 23

Spring 2026 six-week classes

1st Jan. 26th - March 6th
2nd March 16th - April 23th

Spring 2026 three-week classes

1st Jan. 26th - Feb. 13th
2nd Feb. 16th - March 6th
3rd March 16th - April 2th
4th April 6th - April 23th

PLEASE HELP ALIR GROW

There is so much more we want to do for our ALIRian community, but that takes funding.

Please Consider ALIR.

We are a 501.c.3 non-profit educational service for seniors, providing lifelong learning in a social setting, intellectual stimulation, and scholarships.

Please donate to the **Bill Howland Memorial Scholarship Fund**. Donations can be left with Willson or checks mailed to Tom Colbourn, Council Treasurer.

August 8	Summer semester ends
August 11	Fall catalog released
August 18	Fall registration
September 3	Instructor/new student orientation
September 8	Fall classes begin
October 7	1 st Luncheon
October 8	Spring applications available
November 5	2 nd Luncheon
November 7	Spring instructor apps due
November 24-28	Thanksgiving break
December 2	3 rd Luncheon
December 3	Art Show/Performance setup
December 4	Art Show/Performance
December 5	Fall classes end
January 6	Spring catalog released
January 12	Spring registration
January 21	Instructor/new student orientation
January 26	Spring classes begin
February 23	1 st Luncheon
March 4	Summer applications available
March 9 - 13	Spring break
March 25	2 nd Luncheon
April 2	Summer instructor apps due
April 3	Good Friday -campus closed
April 15	3 rd Luncheon/scholarship awards
April 21	Art/Performance set-up
April 22	Art/Performance
April 23	Last day of campus classes
April 24	Last day of online classes
April 24	NEISD campus closed

Fall Class Highlights

Murder is Funny

Dr. Rhonda Rowland & Tresa Fey

Proverbs 17:22 says, "A cheerful heart is good medicine", and we got our full dose as film watchers at "Murder is ...Funny"!!!

We watched side splitting shows that left us holding our bellies and wiping our eyes with pure joy. What a delight. We are already looking forward to "Murder is ...Funny, part 2. ▽



△ Masterpieces, Luncheons & Shady Ladies in Art

Barbara Maphet & Rodney Brown

We all traveled back in time to some fascinating worlds of well-known artists such as Raphael and Peter Bruegel.

We learned why the paintings of John Singer Sargent, Tamara Lempicka, and Diego Velasquez were so controversial. We delved into what impact Venus has had on the art world over the centuries, and why luncheons were painted so many times.

We also learned about beautiful shady ladies and why artists painted them.

◁ Making Greeting Cards Pop

Naomi Best & Judy Callier

We're entering the season of holiday card exchanging – although handmade greeting cards can be a wonderful expression of friendship year round. This hands-on class will give you techniques and ideas for crafting beautiful and unusual greeting cards.





Sometimes a particular scene from childhood flashes across my mind. I vividly see, hear, and feel things as they were at that brief moment in time, even though nothing that unusual actually happened. One of those scenes comes to me every Christmas.

It's around 6 o'clock on a bitterly cold and windy evening in the Texas Panhandle. Mom and I get home from buying groceries. From the garage we shiver through the freezing "back" room and enter the warm kitchen. I stop at the dinner table to take off my coat as Mom unloads two heavy sacks of groceries onto the counter. She's rushing because there are more sacks in the car and the open doors are letting in the cold. My big sister, Mary Lou, has supper started. The table is set. *Little Drummer Boy* is playing on the radio.

That's it. It's that exact moment I see. It makes me feel good now, like it made me feel good then. I guess it's the combination of things; a cold night and a warm kitchen, Mary Lou and Mom there with me, supper on the stove. At nine or ten years old, *Little Drummer Boy* was my favorite Christmas carol. Also adding to my pleasure; I knew one of those grocery sacks contained cranberries.

—Anna Hoelting

HELP WANTED

The **Curriculum Committee** is looking for an organized, energetic person who is interested in contributing to ALIR's learning spirit and ongoing vigor by joining the committee.

The committee recruits and liaisons with ALIR's volunteer instructors, sets up each term's curriculum and schedule, and produces the course catalog. Computer literacy (MS Office primarily) is a requirement; editing experience is helpful.

Interested candidates can send an email to: ALIR@NEISD.net with the subject line: **Curriculum Committee Ad.**

ALIR MISSION STATEMENT

Academy of Learning in Retirement (ALIR) is an all-volunteer organization which provides opportunities for lifelong learning with social and community engagement.



Your stories, poems and ideas can be published in upcoming newsletters.



Please send your submissions to:

Rodney Brown -- rrbrown67@147thhillclimbers.org

Barbara Maphet -- bmaphet@luxurypresentations.com

A Dankfest Story, A Memory Of A 1960's German

“Here is why I’ve escaped from East Berlin.”

Wolf’s snow-covered hand reached for something hidden on a high shelf of his cabin near the Bavarian ski lift. My two British pals and I were breathless, partly because of the extreme cold and partly with anticipation. I, for one, was expecting some old, many folded photo or photos of separated relatives or a sweetheart in West Germany. None of us expected the old, dog-eared, thick book that Wolf showed us, while reverently kissing its cover and then, many of its pages. “Why, it’s only a very, very old outdated Montgomery Ward shopping catalog” I exclaimed, but then I waited with renewed interest, for his explanation.

“Jawohl, but it symbolizes so many possible economic opportunities here in the West,” he replied, tears welling up in his huge blue eyes. The tears forming into icicles as they streamed down his frozen, ruddy cheeks.

Colin, the most curious of our trio, asked him to relate how he got out past the Wall, and not just that, but what kind of economic opportunity was this, manning an out-of-the-way ski lift? Apparently not insulted or discouraged by that second question, Wolf beckoned us to come all the way inside his relatively warmer cabin. He found small wooden stools for each of us, put cups of steaming Gluhwein in our now thawing hands, and waved us to sit down to listen to his rite of passage story.

“I was serving in the Volkspolizei - you’d translate it as ‘People’s Police’ - when I realized that this would qualify me to be assigned to guard that one obstacle to the Promised Land of West. You wouldn’t believe how long it took me to maneuver myself into that duty. The officers in charge were automatically suspicious of any ‘Volpo’ - slang for cop - wanting this most despised of duties, often viewed as a betrayal of our fellow East Berliners. However, when there was an opening, I was finally told to report there for night duty. Then began my painstaking research of where each of the mines were laid, and the exact times that my comrades would be within visual range of me, as they made their rounds on the Wall. Two weeks later, the anniversary of which I celebrate every year now, I was rewarded by Mother Nature herself. There was a terrible blinding ice storm, plus both my fellow guards had bad colds which, combined with their cigarette smoke, caused their eyes to cloud up. Their constant coughing was also a distraction for them, with the noise that it made and the effort needed to control it. I was ready; the adrenaline was coursing through my veins, stronger than the Gluhwein that you’re sipping right now! My full first name, Wolfgang - translated, ‘Way of the Wolf’ - was now fulfilling its promise! Having memorized not only their times of crossing my paths, which were getting more and more seldom with the storm, but also the placement of the obstacles beyond the Wall itself, I was an almost mindless missile, self-propelling in a zigzag route to where the West officially began.

The Americans at Checkpoint Charlie were very welcoming, very helpful, though laughing at my Montgomery Ward vocabulary I had managed to teach myself. They were especially amused at my one possession - besides my rifle of course - which was the catalog itself. One of them sponsored me, let me stay at his own place in West Berlin, and patiently taught me some English that would help me get a job with English speaking tourists. I already was quite a good skier, so when a ski lift position opened the next month, in December, I came down here near Munchen, and I have been here now for three years. I have no family here, but I’ve made some friends, especially with the Americans who have also helped me increase my vocabulary. Of course, my long-range dream would be to get sponsored by an American family to relocate to the U.S., preferably where I could get a job like this, at least at first. I know from what my friends and my catalog of sports outfits tell me, that there are mountains and snow in many of your states.”

At this point he stopped and looked over at me, an American, with the same longing my dog used to have, except his tear-filled eyes were blue, not brown. I could almost see and hear a tail wagging against the floor in back of his

A Dankfest Story continued —

chair. By this time, we had completely thawed out, with little pools dripping from our clothes onto Wolf’s bare wooden floor.

I was extremely touched by the escape story, but our much younger and less sensitive friend, Colin, was still not appeased. “But how could you be so happy here with almost no creature comforts, and so far from your family and friends still behind the Iron Curtain? It seems to me that you’ve traded one prison for another, stuck on the top of a mountain, at the mercy of the elements, unless you do finally get to the ultimate *Land of the Great Shoppers*, and I don’t mean Great Britain. It seems to me that your *precious* catalog has not, and cannot, fulfill its *promises*.”

Wolf stood up solemnly, his eyes now dreamy, every dignified inch of his long body resembling that of a rustic prophet. “It has led me to you three, hasn’t it? Where would you be now, without your Wolf finding you wandering around and completely lost in the ice storm we just endured? There is a reason for everything, ja?”

I was already planning that I would become this most domesticated wolf’s new savior. He would be a welcomed addition to my small circle of friends at home in Aspen, Colorado, as we sat around my warm fire, sipping mulled wine. Slowly, I bent my head down to kiss his old, now damp and moldy, symbol of the promises of a West from several decades ago. Wolf’s and my eyes met, and I kissed him, too.

This would be a Thanksgiving to remember, with two British friends who had hardly heard of the holiday, and a third, a German, who had discovered, and taught me the true meaning of gratitude.

—Joanna McKinnis



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for
the ALIR website

Theme In Yellow

— Carl Sandburg

I spot the hills
With yellow balls in autumn.
I light the prairie cornfields
Orange and tawny gold clusters
And I am called pumpkins.
On the last of October
When dusk is fallen
Children join hands and circle round me
Singing ghost songs
And love to the harvest moon;
I am a jack-o-lantern
With terrible teeth
And the children know
I am fooling.

If you know someone in our ALIR community who needs a card of sympathy, a get-well wish or other words of encouragement (please be specific), notify Paul Cavazos at cavazos.paul@icloud.com or Willson Donovan at ALIR@neisd.net.

NEISD Superintendent, Dr. Sean Maika, visited us on October 1 to explain the importance of the upcoming November 4, 2025 bond issue.

