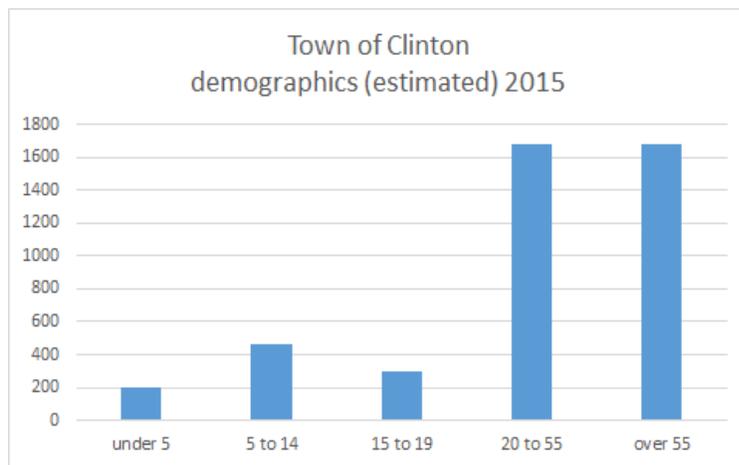


Optimistic Aging @ Clinton Community Library

Although we are only 37.6 sq.mi. in size, our town of Clinton divides into seven distinct hamlets, four school districts, two fire districts, four voting districts and five zip codes. The town is split further, and rather dramatically, by the Taconic Parkway. For fifty-three years it has been our little library that draws us together as a community.

Getting older has its challenges. How we take on these challenges defines them as positive or negative. When the library reviewed the demographics for the Town of Clinton we saw that nearly half of our residents were seniors. The decades of getting older are lengthening and, for many, are challenged by fear of decline, the danger of isolation in a rural community and the inevitable loss of family and friendships. Largely not the internet generation, seniors do have good feelings about libraries in general. Thus the library seemed a natural to awaken and engage the optimist in them.



In 2015 the library conducted community focus groups and circulated a community survey. The seniors told us they wanted the library to help them keep their brains and bodies active and healthy. Learning, once thought to be age based, is now recognized as a critical lifelong thread. As a library we felt very comfortable designing learning opportunities to weave the interactive,

overlapping components of mind, body and spirit. We call the program *Optimistic Aging*.

Optimistic Aging Goals. The *Optimistic Aging* program at Clinton Community Library offers a unique research supported platform encouraging seniors to stay mentally sharp, social engaged and ahead of disease and dementia. Its topics, activities and time schedules dovetail seniors' interests and life style. Thinking that seniors teaching seniors learning may be the best way to entice and engage our older community, we make a strong effort to locate senior program leaders who are as skilled in motivating as in teaching.

Optimistic Aging has three goals:

- 1) Participants will feel the benefits of **stretching, movement and centering**, without strain or pain, and will be motivated to join the town's senior exercise program or integrate exercise or meditation into their daily routine.
- 2) Participants will be more willing to take advantage of the proven interplay between **lifelong learning and overall good health**. They will be motivated to go out to cultural events, join volunteer groups or set up self-directed programs at the library.
- 3) Participants will experience themselves as **socially active and appreciated** and will begin or renew memberships in the town's aging-in-place senior group, an organization of "neighbors helping neighbors continue to live active, independent and safe lives in our own homes as we grow older."

Optimistic Aging Programs. The *Optimistic Aging* series will remain fluid and largely designed by seniors themselves, the content changing as best to promote their health and independence. We have both the space and the spirit to keep these programs free and growing, and we provide transportation to the library when needed.

◆ **The Body.** By age 75, about one in three men and one in two women engage in no physical activity. The loss of strength and stamina attributed to aging is in part caused by this reduced physical activity. The library now offers our older patrons daytime Gentle Chair Yoga and Meditation classes and Tai Chi/Qigong classes. For these we hire enthusiastic leaders who know just how to inspire seniors to master slow Tai Chi sequences and Gentle Yoga poses, or just simply to move more.

Last month we held a Beginner's Chair Yoga Workshop. Of the percentage of patrons surveyed who either agreed or strongly agreed that they benefited from the program:

- 100% learned something that was helpful
- 100% intend to apply what they learned
- 93% felt more confident about what they learned
- 91% were more aware of resources and services provided by the library

Some comments from participants were: *“Delightful instructor – glad to find out about all the programs offered at the library. Wish I knew sooner, as this chair yoga is very helpful.”* And another: *“I appreciate that the instructor went slowly and explained each movement. It’s a very non-judgmental, comfortable environment.”*

Although Tai Chi, Yoga and meditation are mostly new to this older generation, they asked us to add a second Gentle Yoga class and a second Tai Chi class each week. We did.

◆ **The Brain.** In a subtle blend of mental stim with socialization, the library offers seniors a Lunch & Learn program. Our staff prepares the meal and community volunteers fill the dessert table. For the “learn” portion we recruit dynamic presenters from within our own community and from colleges and organizations close by. The topics of our Lunch & Learn programs range from serious to informative to playful:

- June 2016: **“Hoboes to Hoovervilles” – Depression-Era Migration**
- December 2016: **Eleanor Roosevelt, A Life of Betrayal**
- March 2017: **Wild Edibles – Wild Plants, Weeds, and Mushrooms**
- April 2017: **“Mob Men” and Wappinger Warriors: Revisiting the Battle for Dutchess County, 1766**
- June 2017: **History of the Clinton Historical Center and Wing’s Hall**
- October 2017: **Lost Amusement Parks of the Hudson Valley**
- December 2017: **FDR’s Fireside Chats**
- January 2018: **America’s Women’s Air Force Service Pilots of WWII**
- February 2018: **Famous Love Stories of the Gilded Age**
- March 2018: **The Duchess and the Deadly Garden**
- April 2018: **Peter Muir Presents the History of the Blues**
- May 2018: **Walkway Over the Hudson, From Railroad Bridge to State Historic Park**
- June 2018: **Vietnam: A Seabee’s Different Experience**

Some comments from participants were: *“Because of this Lunch & Learn, a visit to ‘The Deadly Garden’ is now on my bucket list! I had no idea such a thing existed!”* And another: *“Peter Muir’s piano playing was fantastic! His talent brought history to life. I never really knew much about blues until this Lunch & Learn.”*

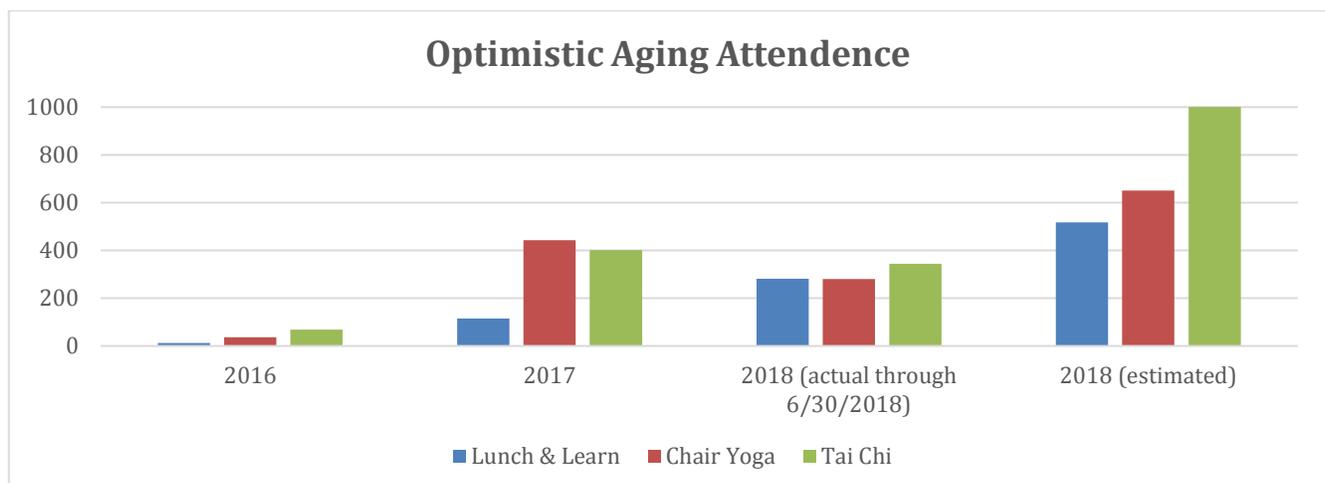
We have also offered our seniors Large Print Books, Audio Books, a Memory Enhancement Workshop, a class in Aromatherapy and two drumming classes to spark brain activity while just having fun.

In 2018 the seniors asked us to increase the frequency of Lunch & Learn from bimonthly to monthly. We did.

◆ **The Spirit.** Isolation is more than being alone. It’s being at risk. Prolonged isolation and loneliness erode well-being – equivalent to smoking fifteen cigarettes a day. Less inclined to drive, more comfortable in the familiarity of their own homes, seniors become increasingly vulnerable to anxiety and depression. Social connections are a necessary pillar of seniors’ health. The *Optimistic Aging* programs provide a safe venue for trying out new friendships and the opportunity for maintaining old ones.

In 2018 seniors organized a Tea Time Book Club for themselves at the library. Over the summer we will again program several of our weekly Concerts on the Library Lawn with music from yesteryear. These concerts bring our seniors out to enjoy the early evening and each other. For the fall we are planning Line Dancing classes and a Memoir Writing series and we will reopen our Digital Literacy Seniors classroom.

Optimistic Aging Outcomes. Our *Optimistic Aging* programs happily show that if you build it, they will come.



	2016	2017	2018 Actual to 6/30/2018	2018 Estimated to 12/31/18
Lunch & Learn	12 (2 Sessions)	115 (5 Sessions)	281 (6 Sessions)	517 (12 session)
Chair Yoga	37 (5 Sessions)	443 (46 Sessions)	280 (28 Sessions)	650 (78 sessions)
Tai Chi	68 (11 Sessions)	401 (52 Sessions)	344 (38 Sessions)	1,027 (96 sessions)

Even seniors from other towns in rural Northeast Dutchess are attracted. Traveling from outside our borders, they have expressed gratitude at finding our luncheon gatherings and movement classes so within their economic and geographical reach.

Optimistic Aging Budget. Clinton Community Library is pleased to be the platform for this renewal of senior energy. Our patrons say they are committed to continuing their participation. It is a win-win collaboration.

Until this year Clinton Community Library had been operating at a significant budget deficit. November's election saw sustainable funding for the library finally approved by Clinton voters. However, much financial catching up remains. The 2018 library budget is \$147,000. We will still need to apply for grants and fund raise extensively in order to support our programming, update our collections and fully fund our *Optimistic Aging* initiative.

We intend to keep growing the *Optimistic Aging* program, with its focus tweaked to reflect seniors' response and requests. Several community organizations (Clinton Historical Society, Nine Partner's Lion's Club, Clinton Volunteer Fire Company, West Clinton Volunteer Fire Company) have co-sponsored *Optimistic Aging* programs. Others in the community help in their own unique way (Friendship Garden Club, local businesses, volunteers). To bring in lecturers and teachers we have cultivated relationships with Omega Institute, Cornell Cooperative Extension, four nearby colleges, the FDR Presidential Library and the Office of the Aging.

Optimistic Aging Budget

- \$ 3,800. Chair Yoga Instructor
- \$ 2,400. Lunch & Learn (12)
- \$ 1,500. Marketing, staff support
- \$ 800. Music Concerts (2-3)
- \$ 300. Large Print & Audio Books
- \$ 200. Line Dance Instructor (4)
- \$ 90. Digital Literacy (6)

- \$ 9,090. Total

Participation is growing in all of the *Optimistic Aging* programs. If we cannot secure sufficient funding, we may have to offer a reduced number of sessions and potentially curtail in full one or more of the existing or planned programs. We would continue to pursue free program providers we know to be committed to *Optimistic Aging*. However, not having the funding would impact the experience level of the "teachers" and the number of sessions offered.

We also would likely have to consider charging a fee for participation in the program. This is a concern since the population we are serving is largely on fixed incomes. It would greatly impact the extent and effectiveness of the program if we had to institute a charge.

Community Is Our Middle Name. In 1965 concerned Clinton residents pulled together a one-room Public Reading Center, joined the Mid-Hudson Library System and officially incorporated in the State of New York. In 1975 largely with community funding, an addition was built onto the Town Hall to house an expanded library. Non-profit status (501(c)(3)) was granted in 1995, and in 2003 a provisional charter was issued by New York State.

In 2016 the library doubled its still small size by refurbishing our downstairs space. Our collections are now current and media diverse and our programs serve all of the town's 4,000+ residents. No person is excluded from library programs or benefits because of race, color, religion, gender, national origin, ancestry, age, medical condition, disability, veteran status, marital status, sexual orientation or any other characteristic protected by law. The library anticipates receiving a permanent charter from the NYS Board of Regents later this year.

It was our seniors who, busy raising their families, imagined and powered up our library in the sixties. The *Optimistic Aging* programs, with gratitude for their energy back then, aims to meet these seniors where they are now. Clinton Community Library will always work to keep our seniors connected to one another and to our community's lifeline.

Summer Concerts on the Library Lawn



Lunch and Learn Lectures



Tai Chi for Seniors



Photo credit: John Dolan

Clinton Community Library 2018 Operating Budget

INCOME

Town of Clinton	\$	115,000
Grants	\$	26,500
Community Fund Raising	\$	3,000
Local Library Services Aid	\$	1,300
Library Charges	\$	1,000
Investment Income	\$	200
Total	\$	147,000

EXPENSES

Personnel	\$	89,000
Community Programs	\$	12,500
Collection Purchases	\$	12,000
Insurance	\$	6,500
Office Supplies	\$	6,000
Mid-Hudson Library System	\$	5,000
Long-Term Plan	\$	4,000
Children's Programs	\$	3,000
Technology Plan	\$	2,000
Newsletter/Annual Report	\$	1,500
Building Maintenance	\$	1,000
Fund Raising	\$	1,000
Staff Development	\$	1,000
Membership Dues	\$	500
Accounting	\$	500
Rent & Utilities	\$	1
Other	\$	1,999
Total	\$	147,000