

Pecan Hill Seminar to bring back tradition of backyard discussions

By Catharin Shepard

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In the 1970s, the late UGA education professor Eugene Johnson would occasionally invite colleagues and students to his house on "Pecan Hill" off Baxter Street for dinner and an evening of innovative thinking, interactive discussions and creative dance routines. The informal gatherings, which ended in 1984, became known as the Pecan Hill Seminars.

Johnson, a professor of adult education who retired in 1978, believed that adults must understand current social trends and question public policy. Participants in the Pecan Hill Seminars were challenged to stretch their minds and incorporate new ways of thinking into their work as adult educators.

Now, after more than 20 years, Johnson's colorful legacy will be renewed during the new Pecan Hill Seminar on April 27–29 at the State Botanical Garden of Georgia. The program will offer a diverse lineup of lectures and group discussions on the theme, "**Social Justice Issues in Adult Education.**"

"Some of our alumni asked that we revive the seminar because they miss the stimulation of the meeting and the opportunity to network with former classmates," said Laura Bierema, associate professor in the department of lifelong education, administration and policy, which is sponsoring the event.

While a faculty member at Washington University in St. Louis in the 1950s, Johnson became nationally recognized for developing the Metroplex Assemblies, a series of innovative radio, television and telephone debate programs that enabled participants from a wide geographic area to discuss important issues of the day in a communal fashion.

As the popularity of these programs increased, professionally moderated community "viewing posts" grew from meetings in private homes to community centers, hospitals, churches, police and fire stations and schools throughout the St. Louis metropolitan area. From 1956–1963, there were more than 600 of these viewing posts.

Margaret E. Holt, a retired UGA faculty member who attended the original Pecan Hill Seminars, will deliver opening remarks.

Keynote speaker Tom Heaney, associate professor of adult education at National-Louis University, will address the topic, "Social Justice and Adult Education in the 21st Century: Rhetoric or Reality." Heaney is director of the adult education doctoral program at National-Louis and co-founder of the Lindeman Center for Community Empowerment through Education, a Chicago-based organization that develops education and research projects with low-income and oppressed groups related to indigenous efforts to change conditions in their neighborhoods, the city, and beyond.

In addition, Rich Rusk, director of the Moore's Ford Project, will provide an update on the effort to memorialize the victims of an infamous area lynching in 1946 and encourage re-opening of the case.



The Pecan Hill Seminars honor the legacy of the late Eugene Johnson (above), a professor of adult education at UGA who believed that adults must understand current social trends and question public policy.

And Jace Weaver, director of the UGA Institute of Native American Studies, will speak about social justice issues in Native American adult education.

Other activities include a tour of the State Botanical Garden and a “Dutch” breakfast. Registration deadline is March 30. The general fee is \$125 but full-time students can register for a discounted fee of \$25.