PLATO members are working hard to implement the Strategic Plan directives and are right on target in maintaining the timetable outlined in the plan. Elsewhere in this Persimmon can be found the details of how committees are working through their directives and responsibilities. One very gratifying element is how new members have volunteered to work on different aspects of the plan. The combination of new energy provided by the “newbies” and the institutional knowledge provided by the rest of us (are we “oldies?”) is taking us in some new directions and reinforcing old ones.

Save the Dates!—Spring 2011 Events

Spring Preview
PLATO’s Spring Preview will be held Wednesday, Feb. 16, 1:30-3:00 pm at the downtown Madison Senior Center, 330 West Mifflin St. You’ll hear a short summary of what’s in store for each class in our spring line-up. Discussion groups are the heartbeat of PLATO. Please call or email the class coordinator to sign up for classes that request pre-registration. See the Spring Schedule and course descriptions in this issue. Volunteers will be on hand to accept new memberships. Join us for this opportunity to see friends and colleagues and meet new people.

PLATO Luncheon
The PLATO Luncheon is scheduled for Tuesday, May 24, 2011 at the Sheraton Hotel on John Nolan Drive. Though last year’s site at the Marriott was well received, the Sheraton is a more centralized location and also provides on-site parking and accessibility for handicapped members. Those who rely on Metro bus service can travel there easily. Watch for more information.

Farewell
Thank you for the opportunity to serve as your liaison with UW-Madison Continuing Studies for the past couple of years. As some of you may have heard, last month I took a new position at the Wisconsin Alumni Association where I am now the Director of Alumni Lifelong Learning. This is familiar territory, as I served in a similar role for eight years on behalf of Continuing Studies prior to assuming leadership for senior learning.

However, you can be assured that Continuing Studies will continue to support and collaborate with PLATO as it has done for the past 23 years. Professor Barry Orton, who has been on the faculty of Continuing Studies for more than 30 years, will serve as your liaison. Your primary administrative contact will continue to be Wendy Kerr. You will be kept informed of all relevant changes, especially as the new Dean of Continuing Studies is named this spring.

It has been an absolute pleasure being involved with PLATO during our journey together. You are part of a remarkable organization populated by talented and dedicated individuals. I have learned a great deal and have been greatly enriched by our time together. I hope to continue to collaborate with you on projects and programs of mutual interest.

Warmly, Sarah Schutt
Hail

As some of you have already heard, I have enthusiastically agreed to become the Continuing Studies liaison to PLATO. I am Professor of Telecommunications in the Department of Professional Development and Applied Studies, and have been on the Madison faculty since 1980. For over 25 years my primary duty at UW-Madison was to assist Wisconsin municipalities with broadband issues, but I also have taught in the Department of Urban and Regional Planning, and have been active in planning, teaching, and managing a wide range of professional continuing education programs, particularly in communications-related areas.

I also have considerable experience in the development of local and national organizations, having co-founded the National Association of Telecommunications Officers and Advisors, the professional organization of local telecommunications regulators, Familial Dysautonomia Hope, a genetic disease research foundation, and the Westside Community Market. I continue to serve as secretary/treasurer of the Westside Community Market, and those of you who patronize the Market will often spot me there selling cheese or apples or chocolate when solo vendors take a break.

I have long admired PLATO, and have worked with several of its leaders on other projects in the past. I look forward to learning from its participants and strengthening PLATO’s ties with UW-Madison. My contact information is below. See my full bio and resume at: www.dcs.wisc.edu/pda/bios/vitae.htm.

Barry Orton
608-262-2394
bmorton@wisc.edu.

New Directors at Large

Joann Savoy
Joann Savoy joined PLATO in 2007 and soon became involved in leadership as a member of the Special Events and Activities Committee. She has been a part of Novels Old and New, and currently is enthusiastic about the Art Museums class.

Joann received her master’s of library science from UW-Madison, and worked as a librarian in many public libraries as well as an analyst for Wisconsin state government. While an academic librarian at UW-Madison she developed two public outreach Web sites, Wisconsin’s Water Library and Wisconsin’s Water Library for Kids. In retirement she pursues an avid interest in antiques, and can often be found at local auctions and estate sales. Joann and her husband live in McFarland, enjoy traveling, and have two children and four grandchildren.

Arden Trine
Arden Trine grew up in Dodgeville, received his BA and MBA from UW-Madison, and his PhD in accounting from University of Illinois–Urbana. He spent six years on the University of Hawaii faculty, returning to Wisconsin in 1970 as professor of accounting and information systems at UW-Oshkosh. Arden retired in 2002, and he and his wife, Jean, moved to Madison. He joined PLATO in 2004, and became co-coordinator of the Managing Your Money class as well as attending additional PLATO classes.

The Trines have four daughters and six grandchildren in the Madison area. They spend time each summer with family on the Outer Banks of North Carolina as well as weekends with grandchildren in the Wisconsin Dells area. They are an active family—birding, ballroom and folk dancing, exercising, and traveling. In the winter, they go to the Rio Grande Valley of Texas for folk dancing and birding.

The Agora, PLATO’s New Literary Publication

As this newsletter reaches your mailbox, the deadline for submissions to PLATO’s new literary publication, The Agora, will be nearing. (Deadline Feb. 1). Managing editor, Edna Canfield, and editor-in-chief, Vaunceil Kruse, have written a few words about their backgrounds in PLATO, their interests, and their visions for The Agora.

Edna Canfield, Managing Editor:
When asked to write a brief bio, I was referred to as “the old timer.” I looked to see if I wore a felt hat, a beard and was followed by a mule! However, I have been in PLATO about 15 years. My favorite class has always been the one I’m in that day. Some of my long-term classes are Literature, Philosophy and Great Books.

Over the years I also developed interest in some new classes i.e., Mystery, Exploring Art and Short Stories/Essays while chair of the Curriculum Committee. In my “first life,” I was a business administration grad and held administrative positions. However, I always loved literature, history, etc. (Read through my local library when young.) In retirement, besides PLATO, I play bridge (the old-people’s game) in several groups and served/serve on several committees and boards, both in PLATO and elsewhere.

continued on page 5
PLATO’s strategic plan for 2010-2015, developed under the leadership of George Rueckert, includes six major issues. Here are the actions taken to date:

1. **Enlarge and reorganize the Board of Directors.** We’ve reorganized and enlarged the Board of Directors by adding two new directors at large, (currently Joann Savoy and Arden Trine). They’re becoming an active part of the board. We’ve added the responsibility for leadership development to the President-elect’s duties.

2. **Develop and use a systematic method for identifying, recruiting and training new leaders.** Tim Otis, President-elect, has assembled a small leadership development team, and has conducted two sessions for members interested in exploring leadership possibilities. About half of the 17 members who attended the leadership development session on Nov. 17 have volunteered to become members of standing committees.

The Leadership Development Team is composed of Tim Otis, Judy Sadowsky, Harold Green, Ruth Diehl, and Lauren Blough. Contact one of them if you would like information about joining a committee or have questions about getting more involved with PLATO.

3. **Improve PLATO’s internal and external communication.** The PLATO Web Site Task Force, a part of the Outreach Committee, has assembled a team of enthusiastic and knowledgeable members who are gathering information. They are working closely with UW Continuing Studies staff to create a web site that PLATO members will rely on for timely and useful information about upcoming activities.

4. **Examine and modernize PLATO’s administrative and operational resources.** No major progress to report.

5. **Enhance and expand programming substantially to meet the expectations of a growing membership.** The Curriculum Committee is expanding the number of programmatic offerings in our traditional time slots and simultaneously exploring scheduling others in the late afternoon and early evening. They’re also exploring new locations for programs.

6. **Manage PLATO’s relationship with the UW-Madison Continuing Studies to reinforce our strong, shared commitment.** The University Relations Committee is beginning to develop a new Memorandum of Agreement with UW-Madison Division of Continuing Studies. It is likely to be simpler and of longer duration than our current two-year MOA. PLATO’s officers have met with Jim Campbell, the interim dean of the division to acquaint him with our organization and programs. The invaluable support from Continuing Studies continues as in the past. It is vital to the smooth functioning of PLATO’s programming.

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**PLATO Committee Reports**

**Special Events Committee**

Most members know the PLATO Special Events Committee as a group of people who come together to make hospitality arrangements for the Fall and Spring Previews. They also are responsible for making arrangements for the Spring Luncheon each May. However, fewer members may be aware that since 2009, in response to an all-member survey, the committee also has taken the responsibility for organizing and hosting individual lectures. The purpose is to find an alternative to semester-long classes to expose members to information about topics of interest in a one-time or short-series format.

In keeping with the participatory purpose of PLATO, topics chosen are those that excite committee members to pursue the search for a speaker and organize a speaking or other event. While the format is primarily lectures, the committee sometimes offers follow-up events. For example, last year’s lecture on endangered songbirds was followed by a walk through the Arboretum to see the local songbird population. Following a lecture on “Shipwrecks of the Great Lakes,” the special events committee planned a day trip to the Maritime Museum in Manitowoc. Most lectures are free to all members. Follow-up events such as trips or meals have a cost to cover the event’s expenses.

**So far this year**

Special Events has provided a lecture in September focusing on Wisconsin history: Native American Effigy Mounds in the Madison and Four Lakes Area by Robert Birmingham. The group also planned an election series of three lectures:

- October—“Politics and the Media” by Prof. Charles Franklin;
- November—“Election Outcomes and Implications” by Prof. David Canon,
- January—“Wisconsin’s Electoral History” by Prof. Emeritus Robert Booth Fowler.

*continued on page 4*
So what’s next?
- Wednesday, Feb. 2, 5:30-8:30 pm: A lecture, “Getting to Know the Country of Nepal” by Jeffrey Potter, a former Fulbright fellow in Nepal. To be held at Madison Senior Center. The lecture will be accompanied by a buffet dinner featuring a traditional Nepalese meal, catered by Madison’s family of Nepalese restaurants.
- Iraq and Iran: A lecture and discussion with Joe Elder (watch for upcoming flyers and weekly PLATO announcements for date, time and place).
- What’s New at Taliesin: A lecture featuring a member of the Taliesin Foundation staff. (Date, time and place to be announced.)

To keep our committee vital, we need your help. New committee members are always welcome. Yes, we work to make the above events happen but we enjoy each other’s company and socialize as well. We meet several times a year at the Sequoya Library on Midvale Boulevard. If interested, call Mary Boyd (608-222-7673) for more information.

UW Relations Committee
by Mike Lovejoy

With this fancy title you might ask who we are and what we do? Addressing the last question first, the UW Relations Committee is tasked with ensuring that our small PLATO bureaucracy and UW Continuing Studies’ large bureaucracy interact with minimal friction and disruption. “Getting along” and resolving problems is the bottom line.

Committee members include Mike Lovejoy (chair), Mary Beatty, Paul Hartwig, Ved Prakash, Judy King, Tim Otis, Tom Martinelli and a DCS rep. That represents a couple of hundred years of PLATO and/or UW work experience.

One issue we dealt with was crafting the original Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with UW-Madison Division of Continuing Studies (DCS). This MOA was part of the required paperwork necessary when PLATO became officially linked with DCS. Later, when OLLI became a part of the DCS world additional modifications were required. More recently, when OLLI withdrew its connection with DCS, those modifications were reversed. Other issues have included negotiating cost-sharing arrangements between DCS and PLATO, obtaining tax exempt status for PLATO, and obtaining insurance for PLATO directors.

The future also holds challenges and opportunities. We are currently researching the pros and cons of establishing an endowment fund with UW Foundation which would allow individuals who wish to donate or bequeath funds for PLATO programs to receive tax deductions. In addition, the current two-year MOA expires in July, 2011 and needs to be significantly updated. Both are significant undertakings and should keep us busy all winter and spring.

Curriculum Committee

The Strategic Action Plan 2010-2015 has assigned a variety of activities to the committee. They include:
1) develop a mentorship program where experienced coordinators work with new coordinators;
2) expand programming from two to three time slots per day to reduce the overcrowded schedule;
3) introduce program offerings in January and February to fill programming voids;
4) explore opportunities to develop participatory, member-led teaching and learning programs in outlying communities of Dane County;
5) publicize the need for more new offerings and new course leadership; ask coordinators to identify prospective coordinator candidates;
6) provide information and support for new coordinators;
7) provide a contact for new coordinators during their first and second semesters;
8) debrief first-time coordinators at the end of the term;
9) encourage coordinators to describe PLATO’s participatory mode of operating at the start of each offering they lead, and identify relevant learning and teaching opportunities at UW-Madison for PLATO members and assist in publicizing them to members.

Several of these activities are shared with other committees.

We believe we are off to a strong start by assigning a committee member to be a contact and mentor to each course coordinator and we invited all coordinators to a brief orientation and question and answer session before the Fall Preview. The committee members each contacted their coordinators mid-term and at the end of the fall semester. We anticipate continuing these contacts and another orientation for new coordinators for the spring semester.

The committee has discussed the options for time slots. We currently have a morning and afternoon time slot with varying times based on coordinator and facility needs. We have added an evening time slot to the spring semester.

The committee can’t take credit, but a December/January course has been scheduled. Those of you with email have received notice.

The committee has had some success in scheduling several new classes for the spring semester. We are still looking for additional coordinators for several popular courses, and are always looking for additional programming. We encourage you to volunteer yourself or others to submit proposals for programs for the future, or to submit topics for courses you would be interested in attending. We would be interested to hear from members who live outside of the Madison city limits with ideas of how to expand our programming to outlying areas.

Web Site Task Force

One goal in the Strategic Action Plan towards improving PLATO’s internal and
external communications is to “enhance PLATO’s website so that it becomes the medium of choice for the organization’s communications.” The plan called for the Outreach Committee to establish a Web Site Task Force by January, 2011. The task force first met in September 2010. Since then the task force has tracked and analyzed the website’s usage, conducted a member survey, reviewed the current design, and proposed a new design. So work on achieving the Strategic Action Plan’s goal is well ahead of schedule. The members from PLATO are Ann Falconer, Tim Otis, Nancy Stroud, Jim Clum, Joanne Strolie, Scott Kolar, and Pat Becker. Members representing DCS are Wendy Kerr and Celeste Anton. Ann Falconer was the task force chair when it was formed, but she turned those duties over to Scott Kolar. Scott is a new PLATO member; he sees the website redesign as a good way to use his background in information technology and to become more involved in PLATO.

Thank you to everyone who completed the website survey. There was about a 10% response rate. The task force is still reviewing the results, but some things you asked for that we hope to include in the redesign are:

• Course descriptions
• Course location maps
• Easier navigation
• A distinctive look
• Administrative information and documents
• More frequent updating

You don’t have to wait for the new website. There is plenty of good information on it right now. For example, you can:

• Check course schedules
• View upcoming PLATO special events
• Renew your membership online
• View the latest issue of The Persimmon
• View Agora Submission Guidelines
• Find links to other sites of interest to seniors

The url is: www.seniorlearning.wisc.edu/plato.htm

The Agora, continued from page 2

I think I became involved in The Agora when I raised my hand at the wrong time. (Just brushing my hair!) As managing editor, I hope to manage to do as little as possible and allow the contributions of our worthy PLATO members do the work for me.

PLATO has so many members with diverse backgrounds and fascinating life experiences, that it seemed a waste not to share their talents with others.

Vuunceil Kruse, Editor-in-Chief:
I joined PLATO last spring, delighted to find an active community of lovers of literature and the arts. Not long after whose warmth and humor made this brand new member feel welcome and comfortable. The process by which a “newbie” found herself editor-in-chief of The Agora seemed a natural evolution grounded in my enthusiasm and my fellow board members’ warmth and humor.

My on again-off again interest in writing was given a boost by the years I spent encouraging the young writers in my classroom. I eventually did some writers’ workshops with Natalie Goldberg. When I introduced Goldberg’s “Writing Practice” to my students, their initial suspicions were, “You want us to write—for no grade—with no feedback?” This was followed by sights to warm a word lover’s heart. My students were writing, and not only listening quietly and respectfully to their peers’ words, but they were smiling and leaning toward the readers. I was living in a community of artists. We learned that, with encouragement, everyone has something to say, has stories to convey in words and often in images, as well.

I see The Agora as an invitation to participate in that listening and leaning in. I know I speak for the entire Editorial Board when I say—The Agora was created for you, fellow PLATO members. We want you to accept the invitation and join in the conversation.

“I found, not only a group ready for serious talk about arts and letters, but a circle of new friends whose warmth and humor made this brand new member feel welcome and comfortable.”

I joined PLATO I received, with equal enthusiasm, Fred Ross’s email calling for members interested in developing a literary journal. In 2006, after taking early retirement from my career teaching English in a small Illinois high school, I moved to Madison hoping to pursue a second career working for a nonprofit. I have worked for the Wisconsin office of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) for more than four years, editing the newsletter, maintaining the website and performing other business and training tasks.

As satisfying as my work for NAMI is, I desperately miss the give and take of ideas and attention to the arts that I enjoyed with my students. In the first meeting of what would become The Agora Editorial Board I found, not only a group ready for serious talk about arts and letters, but a circle of new friends...
PLATO Past and Present: Where We Came From and How We Grew

by Marvin Beatty and Tim Otis

We have Bob Elsas, a CPA from Madison, to thank for our origin. He visited family in Los Angeles in 1986 and experienced UCLA’s Perpetual Learning and Teaching Organization (PLATO) there. When he returned to Madison he embarked on a quest to start a similar organization here. It took persistence. Not until he visited Dean Harland Samson and Associate Dean Nancy Abraham of the UW’s Division of Summer Sessions did he gain interest and support from the university.

In October 1986, Abraham invited Elsas and a few friends to launch PLATO here and offered strong support from Division of Summer Sessions. With this institutional backing, Elsas and friends forged ahead. By the winter of 1987, PLATO was able to offer three study/discussion groups and had recruited 39 members.

The UW, through its designated liaison, Alice Dubois, did almost everything but the programming, which was developed by Elsas and his friends. Dubois arranged for leaders of the fledgling PLATO group to pitch the idea of their new organization at the Division of Summer Sessions’ Guest Tea. She also designed a flyer for the organization, helped PLATO members register as UW Guest students, collected course fees, wrote news releases and articles. Membership fees were initially $3 per class, then changed to $15 per year.

Deans Samson and Abraham kept close track of the new organization. In May 1987, Dean Samson told the group (reported in the minutes of a PLATO planning committee meeting) that “more structure is needed.” The founding members, led by Norman Jacobson as president, took his advice seriously and by late in 1987 were developing a constitution, by-laws and a committee structure. During the year the group broadened its curriculum, enlarged its membership and increased its fees.

In 1990 Elsas, in a review of PLATO’s beginnings, stated, “PLATO owes a debt to its UW sponsors who have subsidized its early years to provide a solid base. Deans Samson and Abraham and Advisor Dubois should be particularly mentioned.”

From the start, member-led study/discussion groups were the heart of UW-Madison’s PLATO—named the Participatory Learning and Teaching Organization. By 1989 the organization had 72 members and operated six study/discussion groups that met for five weeks each. The leaders also developed guidelines for group coordinators.

During the 1990/91 programming year, PLATO held its first preview, lengthened the time study/discussion groups met to 12 weeks, and developed a Manual of Policies and Procedures. The group had a mailing list of 125 names, 105 members and 80 active program participants. The organization held two distinguished lectures, one by James Doyle and one by Paul Soglin. The latter was attended by 120 members and friends.

But apparently not everyone followed the organization’s procedures on time that year. UW liaison, Mary Jo Biechler, who succeeded Alice Dubois, was prodding PLATO leaders in writing on housekeeping and programmatic issues.

By 1992 the size and activity of PLATO was causing workload problems for Ms. Biechler. In May 1992, she wrote Associate Dean Patrick Runde, who replaced Abraham, with these concerns:

“Due to the size and nature now of obligations (financial, logistics, coordination, national affiliation, and curriculum) and the fact that as retired people they do not seek nor want nor expect new work assignments or administrative tasks, the question has to be asked: ‘how much can the University of Wisconsin—Madison DSS/ICP invest in this organization which was fostered and encouraged in 1987?’

Biechler’s concerns led PLATO to fund a part time UW position to help with the administrative workload. That arrangement has morphed into the current UW-DCS/PLATO division of membership dues in a 30/70 ratio. (Since 1997, Wendy Kerr has carried out the administrative duties for PLATO, and since 2001, when Biechler retired, Kerr was the UW administrative liaison to PLATO. In 2005 Sarah Schutt became Director of Senior Learning at DCS and worked closely with PLATO until her recent departure.

PLATO Strategic Plan identifies need to develop a new generation of leaders

Since PLATO is member-run and has a rapidly growing membership, there is a need to attract more members who are willing to perform the necessary and important functions that enable our organization to continue to be vibrant and successful.

This need for increased member involvement was one of the major areas addressed at the April, 2010 strategic planning retreat. At its August meeting, the PLATO board established a Leadership Development Team (LDT) that is charged with recruiting, developing, and supporting members to serve on PLATO’s Curriculum, Outreach, Special Events, and University Relations Committees.

This fall the LDT hosted an informational meeting for those who may be interested in committee participation. The meeting was successful; 17 people attended, and 10 made definite commitments to join a committee. Three additional people, who could not attend, have indicated a willingness to get involved.

In late January or early February, the Leadership Development Team and the Special Events Committee will co-host an orientation session for new PLATO members. At that session, we give new members a general overview of PLATO including our history, our close relationship with the UW, and our mission, vision, and values. All PLATO members are welcome, although there will be a special emphasis on orienting newer members.

The strength of PLATO comes from the many contributions that its members make—leading classes, serving on committees, actively participating in classes and events, and in sharing ideas. If you have not already done so, we hope you will contribute your skills and talents.