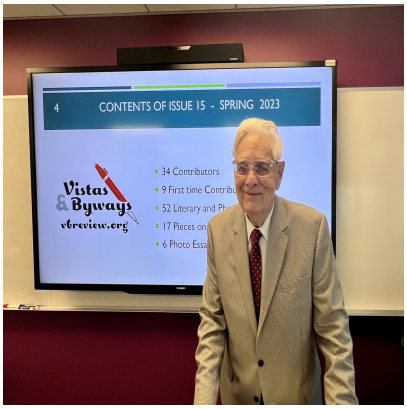


Retired AT&T exec and architect of local online literary review has a passion for nurturing other peopleâ??s talents

Description

default watermark

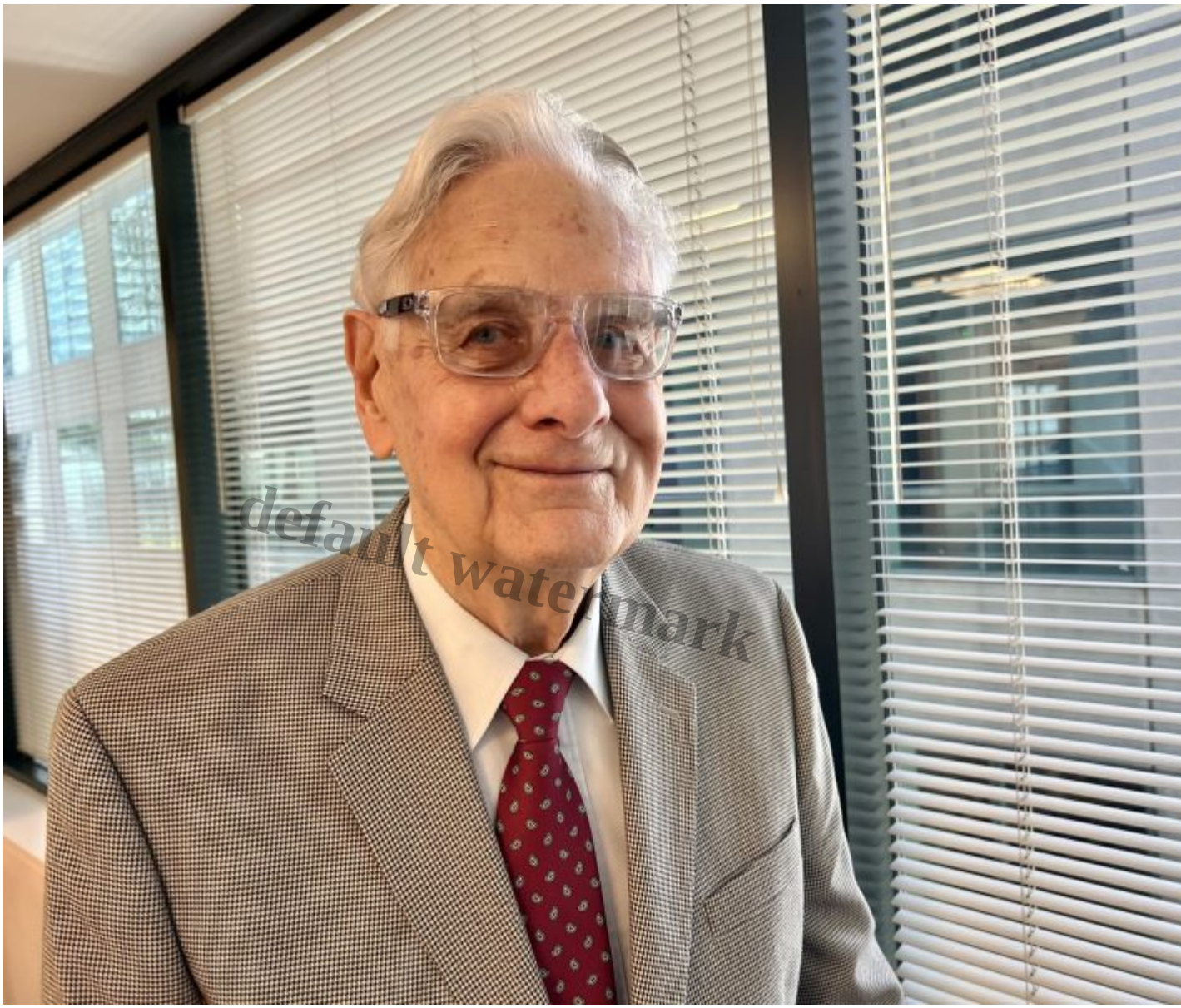
When he was young, Joe Catalano loved to â??play with words,â?• and some of his earliest childhood memories, he said, are of writing. But college, a career, and family intervened and he â??put down his penâ?• for decades.

Now 76 and retired after a long career practicing law, Catalano can be found writing, editing, and taking pictures for â??Vistas & Byways,â?• an online literary magazine published out of San Francisco State Universityâ??s adult education program. â??There are just a few things in life that are more delightful than being published, even though I canâ??t think of any of them right now,â?• he said.

For that, he can thank Mike Lambert, who founded the magazine in 2015. While Lambert, 89, no longer leads â??Vistas & Bywaysâ?• â?? he now serves as its webmaster â?? he remains a well-liked and respected figure. â??Iâ??m willing to wager Mike is the only octogenarian webmaster of a literary magazine in the country, and he is funny, quirky, and skillful,â?• said Catalano. The magazineâ??s staffers say working on the journal he founded has kindled their passion for writing and publishing and inspired them to continue learning new things.

15th issue goes live

The magazine is a semi-annual online journal publishing works of fiction, non-fiction, poetry, and photography by members of San Francisco Stateâ??s Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, known as OLLI. Its 15th issue went live in early May, containing 52 literary and photographic works by 39 volunteers.



Mike Lambert, a retired AT&T executive, founded two literary magazines, recognizing the talents of other seniors he met in various lifelong learning programs. (Photos by Colin Campbell)

Lambert is a retired AT&T executive who has shared his passion for writing and lifelong learning with neighbors and colleagues in San Francisco and the foothills of the Sierra. Over the years, Lambert founded two literary magazines â?? first the â??Wildwood Literary Review,â?• and later â??Vistas & Bywaysâ?• â?? several literature-focused discussion groups, and helped start an informal adult education program in Lake Wildwood, a small town about an hour northeast of Sacramento.

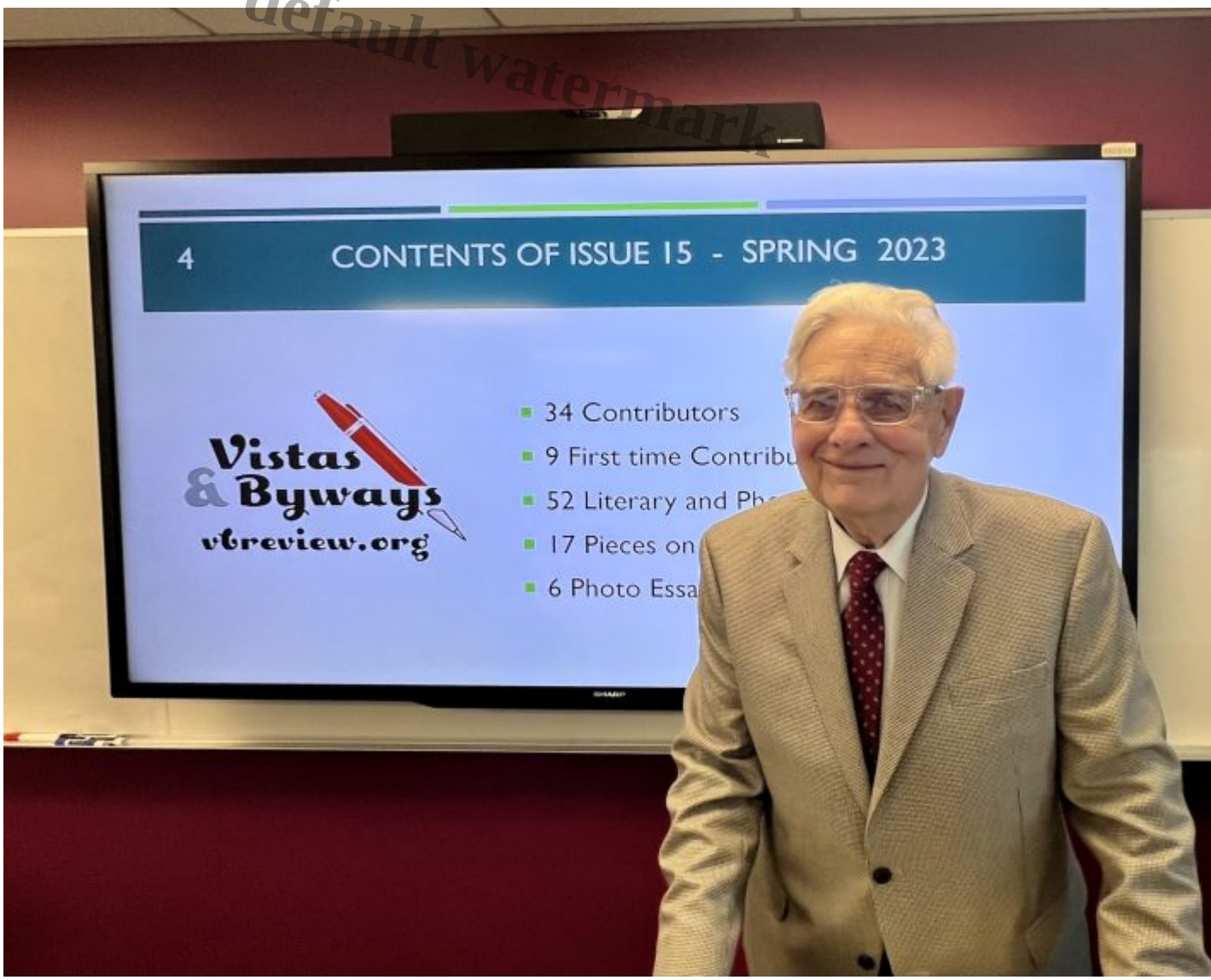
He has a bachelorâ??s degree in engineering from Iowa State University and an MBA from Rutgers, but rather than concentrate on technical issues at AT&T, he focused on management training. â??It was there I learned the Socratic method of teaching â?? posing open-ended questions to students,â?• a people-oriented management style that bolstered his ability to build teams.

After working at AT&T during the tumultuous period the former Ma Bell was being broken apart by the federal government, Lambert opted for early retirement in 1987.

â??In thrallâ?? with Steinbeck

Like many seniors who retire, Lambert, then 53, â??couldnâ??t stand the boredom,â?• so he became an adjunct instructor at SF Stateâ??s business school. Fifteen years later, he retired again and in search of intellectual stimulation, began taking classes in writing and literature at the University of San Franciscoâ??s Fromm Institute for Lifelong Learning. â??I took an American classics survey course on the short story and fell in thrall with Hemingway and Steinbeck,â?• Lambert said.

He was inspired. So, when he and his wife, Norita, bought a second home in Lake Wildwood, he recruited faculty members from a nearby community college and started what he calls â??a mini-Fromm.â?• The impromptu adult education group offered courses on Steinbeck and Hemingway, finance, and the Bible as literature, Lambert said.



> Mike Lambertâ??s first literary review, in Lake Wildwood, grew out of a learning group he started by recruiting faculty members from a nearby community college.

The mini-Fromm proved popular and soon residents were displaying their memoirs and novels at the townâ??s craft fair. Others published their work in the local newspaper. Then, he and a colleague started a writersâ?? group and its success prompted them to think of starting an online literary review. â??Some seniors are talented writers and I wanted to foster that,â?• he said.

Looking for a model, Lambert found several online literary reviews, including one from Minnetonka, Minnesota. â??If a little town like Minnetonka can produce a review, we certainly could,â?• he said, â??and so we created â??The Wildwood Literary Review.â?•

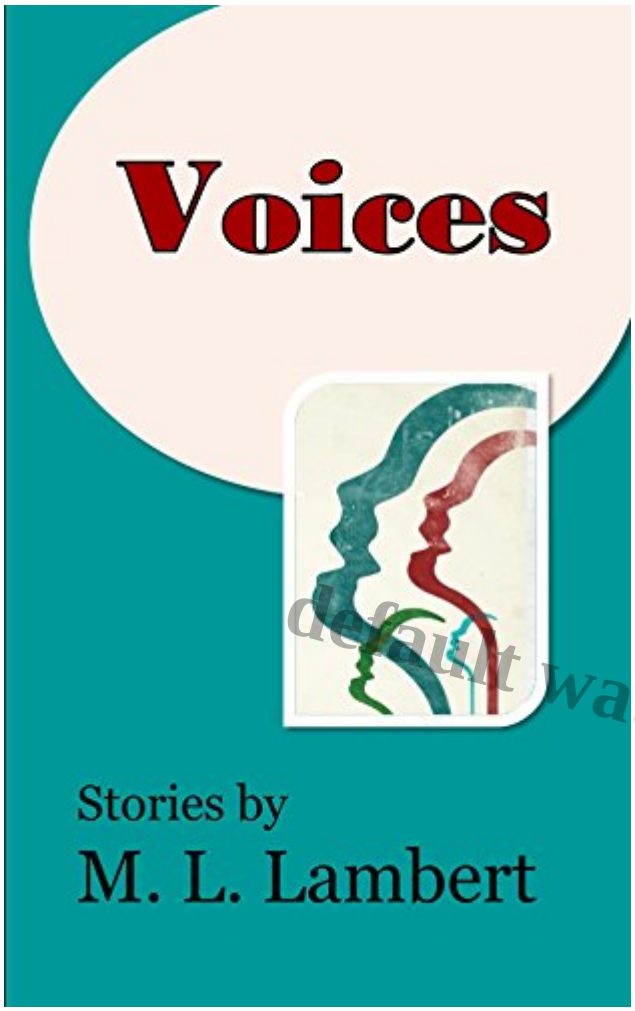
Fostering senior talent

Lambert acted as editor-in-chief, publisher, and webmaster. He and his colleagues published 16 quarterly issues before the Lamberts decided that maintaining two homes was too much for them and moved back to their primary home in San Franciscoâ??s Ingleside district. The Review no longer has a web presence.

default watermark

Back in San Francisco, Lambert took more writing classes at OLLI. Seeing â??the high quality of my fellow studentsâ?? writing,â?• he said, â??I wanted to start a literary review, like the one I initiated in Lake Wildwood.â?•

Lambert gathered a few of his classmates, got approval from the administration, and OLLIâ??s literary review was born.



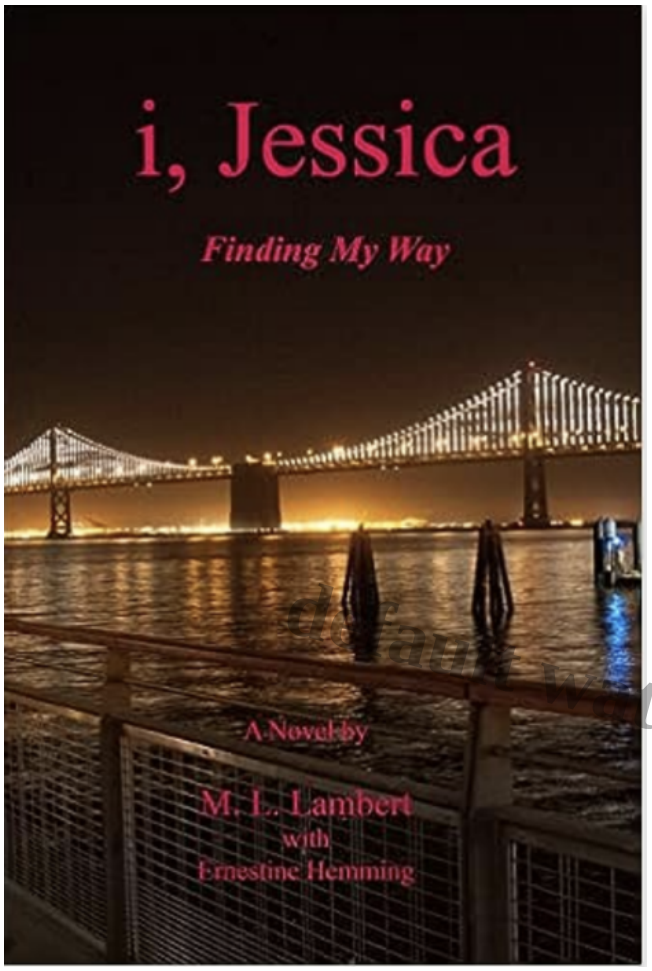
default watermark

More than 100 seniors, including Catalano, have found a creative outlet working on the eight-year-old magazine. Some, like Barbara Applegate, who kept a journal when she was young but never attempted other forms of writing, said the opportunity to be published is â??thrilling.â?• Others, like Charlene Anderson, who wrote a novel in her spare time and nurtured literary ambitions but had no way to bring them to fruition, have become leaders of the magazine. Sheâ??s been on the board of â??Vistas and Bywaysâ?• since its inception.

Lambert continues to submit his poetry and short stories to the review each quarter. After serving as publisher for the first issue, he stepped down and is now focused on maintaining the reviewâ??s website.

Meanwhile, Lambert continues to work on literary projects beyond the pages of â??Vistas & Byways.â?• Heâ??s self-published a book of short stories and two novels. â??Voicesâ?• tells the stories of San Franciscans facing various challenges. Two â??I, Jessicaâ?• novels take you through six anxiety-filled weeks of a single young woman living in the city.

â??Fortunately, the self-publication route exists now to salve the egos of us amateur writers,â?• Lambert said. Heâ??s also written five smaller books, ranging from personal reflections to â??personal conversations with my father, wherever he is,â?• distributed only to family and a small group of friends.



dream watermark

Lambert grew up in Oskaloosa, Iowa, with his mother, grandmother, aunt, stepfather, and two half-siblings. He married his high school sweetheart and had three sons. Two years after his 14-year marriage dissolved, he married the nurse from AT&T headquarters in San Franciscoâ??s financial district. They have been together for 51 years.

â??Vistas & Bywaysâ?• continues to help seniors discover and utilize talents they may not have known they possessed, staffers said. â??I was inspired by the founding of â??Vistas & Byways,â?? to send them my writing, and was thrilled that they continue to publish my work,â?• said Barbara Applegate, who serves on the reviewâ??s editorial board.

And for Elsa Fernandez, OLLI and the review remind her that although â??we thought we left learning behind; we havenâ??t.â?•

For Lambert, his enthusiasm for the literary journal is undiminished. At a recent anniversary party, he donned a 1940s-style reporterâ??s hat and wore a big sign around his neck saying, â??â??Vistas & Bywaysâ?? Staff Reporter.â?•

Category

1. All Posts

Date Created
08/09/2023

Author
jrobbins

default watermark