

Library offers lecture in genealogy

By Autumn Rose Advocate Staff Writer | Posted: Tuesday, February 14, 2012 10:00 am

When Eileen Souza retired, she decided to start a business based on what she said is one of the world's most popular hobbies: genealogy.

In 2010 Souza founded Old Bones Genealogy after working for 40 years in information technology, she said. She had been doing family research as a hobby for 16 years, but she said she decided to turn it into a business after doing market research and discovering that genealogy was a hot topic all around the world.

"Genealogy has been one of the world's most popular hobbies for quite a few years, and it seems to be improving rather than fading," Souza said.

Souza said the popularity of shows such as NBC's "Who Do You Think You Are," which is in its second season, has increased public interest in the field of genealogy. "Who Do You Think You Are" follows celebrities as they search for their ancestors and learn surprising things about their families.

PBS also has its own ancestry series, titled Finding Your Roots, about the genealogy and genetics of famous Americans.

Souza said she thinks shows like these coupled with commercials and advertisements from genealogy websites like www.ancestry.com have sparked interest in the study of family lineage.

But people get into genealogy for a number of reasons, she said.

For instance, Souza said she began doing family research in 1996 because she realized she was the second oldest living person in her family.

"Nobody knew anything about our family. I have grandchildren and great grandchildren, and it would be really sad if when I go they don't even know the little bit about our family that I know," she said. "So I wanted be able to pass that knowledge down to decedents to keep knowledge of the family tree going."

Souza said she comes from a long line of coal miners and hasn't found any famous ancestors in her family, but she has come across some interesting stories.

For instance, she learned that one of her great grandmother's daughters had an illegitimate child. The daughter went on to marry and start another family, but her illegitimate child lived with his grandmother. Even so, Souza said records show that the boy was accepted into the family.

She said several of the clients she has worked with have been linked to revolutionary war heroes, something she said is common in Maryland.

Other genealogists and their clients, she said, get into the business because they have family stories that they want to prove or disprove, to discover long-lost living relatives or to write a family history book. Tracing medical history has also become popular because of the new uses of DNA in genealogy, she said.

Although she has always dreaded public speaking, Souza said she enjoys sharing her knowledge of genealogy and family research with others.

In July 2011 she gave a presentation at the Eldersburg Branch of the Carroll County Public Library titled, "Getting Started with Your Genealogy," which taught the basics of beginning family research. She said she was only expecting maybe five or six people to show up, but she was thrilled when she ended up lecturing a crowd of around 25.

The program was so popular that she was asked to return for a lecture Feb. 18, she said.

Rachel Pekar, virtual services supervisor at the Carroll County Public Library, set up the original program with Souza last summer.

"The first program was popular and the attendees requested she come back again, so that is why we scheduled this upcoming program," Pekar said. "Since she is the expert she took care of everything."

This time around Souza will be presenting "Dig Up Your Ancestors Online," going more in depth about researching ancestry online and all the tools that are available.

There are several websites and genealogical programs people can use to research and organize their ancestry.

But the Internet and computer software can go so far in the search for ancestors, she said.

"As much information is online, it's probably only a quarter of what's actually out there to find," Souza said.

She said other resources are available, like the Genealogical Society of Carroll County, of which she is the vice president and programming chairwoman.

Public libraries also offer resources for genealogy, especially the Westminster Branch of the Carroll County Public Library, which she said has an extensive genealogy section.

The first steps a person should take to dive into genealogy are to write down all the known information about his or her family, interview family members and research records, Souza said.

Once the process has begun, she said she thinks it is hard for most people to stop, including herself.

“It’s addictive. In computers I was always the troubleshooter type and I find a lot of the same satisfaction in doing this,” she said. “I’m also a mystery reader and it seems everytime I find something or make a discovery im sovling a mystery.”