At the closing event in the Spring 2004 Senior Scholars Program series, 150 senior citizens sit at tables in the Citadel Beach House great room on the Isle of Palms. The room overlooks the ocean, but the group faces the other direction, listening intently as Shawn Halifax, a guest lecturer from Caw Caw Interpretive Center, talks about the practice of hoodoo, a folk magic tradition that was first practiced in Charleston by slaves who originated from West Africa.

Senior Scholars, a College of Graduate and Professional Studies (CGPS) outreach program for senior academic enrichment, is the brainchild of Associate Dean Patricia Ezell who started the series with a handful of members in 1997.

“We created the program when we learned from senior adult focus groups that these senior adults are interested in remaining intellectually, physically and socially alive,” says Ezell. “They are well educated, well traveled and have led interesting, productive lives. They have something to share with The Citadel from their experiences, and The Citadel, through this program, has many resources to share with them.”

Since its humble beginnings, Senior Scholars has grown to more than 150 members. The lectures range from Charleston history to world history, plantations of the Lowcountry to flora and fauna, and literature and film to computing. Open to those 55 and older, the cost is $25 a term or $75 a year.

Membership includes a Citadel student ID, which gives seniors library and computer lab privileges. They also get discounted athletic event tickets as well as invitations to fine arts events and parades.

The spring program was a blockbuster with lectures on China, the iconography of Elizabeth I, the medieval crusades, Southern literature, the Charleston renaissance, South Carolina heritage and the late U.S. Sen. Strom Thurmond. For the grand finale, the last program was scheduled off campus at the beach house and added a little magic with the subject of Hoodoo and Voodoo.

Among those listening to Halifax at the beach house are the wife of a 1930 grad, a former business faculty member, a CGPS alumna, a 1950 alumnus, a mother of two sons who graduated in 1966 and 1970, the wife of a retired librarian, a Bulldogs fan and contributor to The Brigadier Foundation, and the mother-in-law of a professor. But there are many others in the group whose only affiliation with The Citadel is through Senior Scholars.

“I have recently retired, and it’s great to go to lectures and learn something other than my job,” says Kevan-Ann Spangler, who discovered the program from a neighbor walking by her house.

“It’s an excellent bridge into the Charleston community for newcomers. I appreciate the broad learning opportunity and introduction to The Citadel,” says Nelson Durand, who has been a member of the program for four years.

Robert Millard, who has been a member since he learned about Senior Scholars from a newspaper article, jokingly says, “There are too many old people!”

And Donald Coleman adds, “It’s nice meeting people, including our 91-year-old classmate!”

In addition to the programs, there are two things that scholars agree bring them back: the cookies served at the lectures and Pat Ezell.

“My fondest memory will always be of Pat who has done such a marvelous job for us,” says Miriam Kurjubin.

Betty Adams, who learned about the program from Ezell’s husband, Hack, a professor at The Citadel since 1969, says, “We were in a group of very nice and friendly men and women, and we loved Pat Ezell. She organized everything so well, and she’s such a lovely lady.”

Ezell began her career with The Citadel in 1981 as a captain and assistant director of continuing education. In the ensuing years, she worked her way to the position of colonel and associate dean. CGPS flourished under her tenure with significant growth and expanded programs. In 1997, she was named Employee of the Year, and in 2004, she received the Palmetto Medal Award for her exceptional performance at The Citadel.

After the Hoodoo lecture ends, Mike McSherry, a charter member, stands to say a goodbye on behalf of the seniors to Ezell, who will retire soon. He presents her with a commissioned painting by Charleston artist Candace Trickey. The picture is of the tree in front of 16 Register Road where she and Hack lived on campus for 22 years.

“But I’m not really leaving you,” Ezell insists as she joins McSherry. “Now, I’m going to become one of you!”