

RETIREMENT REPORT

Your Guide to a Richer Retirement

JUNE 2008 VOLUME 15 NUMBER 6 \$5.00

Fitting the Pieces of a Retirement Puzzle

A North Carolina workshop helps soul searchers create plans for a meaningful retirement.

YOU'VE BEEN successful in your career, but as you near the end, you're facing 20 years or maybe even more of retirement. The opportunities are vast—exciting, but sort of scary. You don't want to squander your remaining time. So how do you sort out all the choices? What will give you meaning in this next stage of life? And how do you put all the puzzle pieces in place?

I spent two and a half days in mid April with about 25 others who were pondering such questions and struggling for answers. We were all attending "Paths to Creative Retirement," a workshop at the North Carolina Center for Creative Retirement, part of the University of North Carolina at Asheville. As a condition for covering the sessions, I was required to take part as a preretiree.

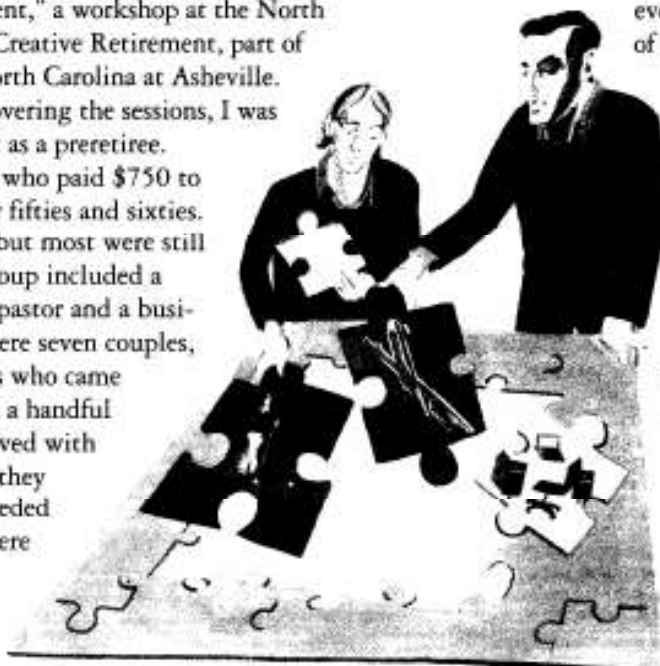
The participants, who paid \$750 to attend, were in their fifties and sixties. A few were retired, but most were still working, and the group included a couple of doctors, a pastor and a business owner. There were seven couples, several married folks who came without spouses and a handful of singles. Some arrived with a good idea of what they wanted to do but needed to make sure they were on the right track. Others didn't have a clue.

Most were not worried about money. Instead, they traveled from as far away as Oregon and New Hampshire to explore the non-financial, emotional side of retirement. "We want people to identify their top priorities and the values that are most important to their lives," said Ronald Manheimer, the center's executive director. "Then we encourage them to be a little imaginative about what comes next and become less anxious about their new freedom."

Linda Laurich, 63, who recently retired as director of government affairs for a company in Madison, Wis., said the workshop "forced me to home in on the hard questions. What do I really value? What do I need as a person?" Although Laurich had already decided that she would relocate, the workshop motivated her to schedule a July trip to North Carolina to scout possible retirement sites.

The North Carolina Center for Creative Retirement (www.unca.edu/ncccr) is not the place to go if you want one-on-one advice. We worked in groups, engaging in various exercises that were designed to help us probe everything from the importance of friendships to our regrets about unfulfilled wishes.

The group dynamic was an important part of the process. Many participants took comfort that others were experiencing similar uncertainties. Often, the workshop seemed like a consciousness-raising session. Some participants picked up ideas from others. And by talking about their values and interests, many came to a better understanding of what they want. Some exercises were moderated by retirees who had moved to Asheville and imparted



wisdom from their own retirement experiences.

"As I listened to other people discuss their fears and dreams, I found myself saying, 'I would like to spend a month in Tuscany,'" Pam Hatton, 64, a retired librarian from Geneseo, N.Y., told the group. "I didn't even know I wanted that." Pam attended with her husband, Art, 65, a retiree.

Packing for the Retirement Journey

The workshop began soon after breakfast on Friday. We broke into small groups to discuss our "fears and fantasies" about retirement. People who had been strangers a couple of hours earlier opened up without reservation. Nancy Sorenson, 63, a college dean from Moraga, Cal., spoke for many pre-retirees when she said: "I fear the loss of stimulation that comes with work. It gives me meaning and structure." DeAnne Rogers, 59, a retiree who formerly arranged photo shoots, worried that if she moved, "there would be a loss of friends, and even my plumber."

To break the ice, each group made a presentation. Representing one group, Barbara Guardianier, 53, a science teacher, pretended to be packing a bag for a trip to retirement. She tossed in pieces of paper that said "take up piano or pottery," "less responsibility for family" and "reconnect to community." She tossed away "being adrift," "loss" and "bored/sameness." She ended with, "I guess I'm packed." We all applauded.

The idea of tackling our fears so that we could develop the confidence to make imaginative yet rational decisions was a recurring theme. One exercise that was particularly illuminating was called Mansions of the Soul. Each room in the floor plan represented a different facet of life—study for life-long learning, living room for leisure, kitchen for "lifestyle maintenance" and so forth. We were asked to figure out how much time was spent in each room, and how much time we would prefer to spend.

We discussed the steps we could take to pursue activities we enjoy. For the pre-retirees, work was a big barrier, but Denise Snodgrass, the center's assistant director, noted that there is often choice involved. "If you want to know what somebody values, ask them how they spend their time," she said.

Gerry Parfitt, 57, who attended the session with her husband, Fran, 60, realized that she was working ten hours a day, as a hygienist for Fran's dental practice. "I wondered why I don't have time to do what I want to do. Now I know why," said Gerry, who lives in Grosse Point Farms, Mich. She noted that they spent too much time "decluttering" the house. "We need to spend more time on other things," she said. "We just bought new bikes. I want to do that."

Spending time riding a bike versus decluttering a house may not seem directly related to retirement. But the exercise was aimed at getting participants to start thinking about what's important to them and how they can pursue what they really want.

During the Mansions session, Fran said he was mulling a culinary arts career. The next day, when we discussed what we would do with a \$100,000 or \$1 million windfall, Fran said he dreamed of running a small baked-goods shop.

A key element of the workshop was to force participants to develop an action plan that considers all aspects of one's life, such as family relationships, social life and the need for meaning. Manheimer and Snodgrass emphasized that a plan could change over time, and we didn't need to know exactly what we wanted to do at this point. But during presentations we each had to make at the end of the workshop, we had to discuss some facets of a plan.

Making Dreams Come True

Transforming a wish list into reality was the objective of several small-group exercises on Saturday. I

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Published monthly (ISSN# 1075-6671); \$59.95 for one year; \$89.95 for two years; \$114.95 for three years. Copyright © 2008 by The Kiplinger Washington Editors Inc., 1729 H St., N.W., Washington, DC 20006-3938.

Periodicals postage paid in Washington, DC.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Kiplinger's RETIREMENT REPORT, P.O. Box 3295, Harlan, IA 51593.

attended "Making a Dream List Come True." Snodgrass asked us to write a list of all the things we'd like to do if money, age or health were not an issue. "It's a daydream, a what-if, an image," she said.

We sorted our dreams by priority, the top ones being those that we're fully committed to achieve. Then we had to come up with concrete ways to make our dreams come true. "A lot of you are doing this in your work life and don't do this in your personal life," Snodgrass noted.

Sorenson, the college dean who a day earlier was discussing her concerns about leaving the workplace, was already figuring out ways to fit in watercolor classes and more travel. "I work 55 hours a week so I don't have a lot of time, but I do have the discipline to do certain things," she said.

For some couples, the workshop helped to open up lines of communication. Consider Barbara and Ned Guardianier, who live in New Hampton, N.H. Ned, 67, is a property manager who described himself as a "literal person" and his wife as a "visionary." Indeed, Barbara said she had been thinking of one day opening a "quirky" teahouse or bed-and-breakfast. She was beginning to scout possible relocation sites. But, she said, Ned was not responding to her efforts. "I was getting nothing from him," she said.

That is, until Ned agreed to attend the workshop. Although he is not necessarily on board with Barbara's specific ideas, Ned said the sessions helped him understand the importance of goals. "Unless you have a vision, you can't reach it," he said. "I'm much more confident now to take a leap of faith." And by hearing others discuss their fears, Ned said, Barbara may be better able to "understand my reservations." He noted, "This will give us a good starting point."

No participant left clutching a full-blown retirement plan. But many had a better understanding of what it takes to come up with one, whether it's investigating social opportunities before you relocate or diligently exploring options for volunteer work or lifelong learning.

We each had an assignment when we left—to take at least one step to carry out a plan. One participant reported arranging a forum of retirees at his house. Another went to church to meet new people. Laurich, who noted that her exercise room in Mansions of the Soul was "dusty and vacant," has called a nutritionist to improve her health.

Before leaving for Asheville, the Parfitts were about to sell their dental practice. When he returned

From the Editor

INVESTORS WON a big victory when the U.S. Supreme Court recently decided to allow dozens of states to continue to offer in-state residents a special tax break on municipal bonds issued within their borders. Buyers of such bonds will continue to be exempt from both federal and local taxes on the interest from those investments.

The decision should be especially gratifying to income-seeking retirees in high-tax states such as California and New York. Many analysts also believe that the ruling will add some stability in what has been a rocky year in the municipal bond market.

I was particularly pleased to see that Justice David Souter cited a *Kiplinger's Retirement Report* story in his majority opinion. We noted in that article that without the current tax scheme there would be little incentive for mutual fund companies to create single-state municipal bond funds.



Susan B. Garland, *Editor*

home, Fran said, he enrolled in a culinary arts course and a class on creating an herb garden.

Fran also said he and Gerry would like to build a small "dream house" with a simpler floor plan—and less room for clutter. He said the workshop encouraged him to get moving. "You keep dreaming about things, but you don't do anything about it," he said.

Meanwhile, DeAnne Rogers has been investigating certification in an alternative medical therapy called healing touch. Her recent visit to Asheville confirmed an earlier desire to move there and build a home with a mountain view. "I have to think through how I will make connections to the community, how I will get a part-time or full-time career going, and how I will pick myself up and go there," she said.

As for me, I spoke with my husband about one day living overseas. I don't have all the pieces of my move in place, but I'm more confident than ever that it will happen. **K**—SUSAN B. GARLAND