

# STARTING OVER

## 'Retirees' Find Their Way Back Into Workforce

BY SUSAN USHER

Retirement.

The word implies letting go, giving up, dropping out of society.

But, as Albert Myers and Christopher Pandersen note in their book, *Success Over Sixty*, that traditional approach to the "good life" of retirement isn't always what it's cracked up to be.

Studies done at Harvard and Johns Hopkins universities report the vast majority of retired people list boredom as their primary complaint, the two write. And people who choose to fully "drop out" upon retirement survive an average of only six years beyond their retirement date.

Gerontologist Alex Comfort may have been on the right track when

he said, "Two weeks is about the ideal length of time to retire."

Researchers are finding out what most retirees could have told them up front: As painting contractor and retired professional firefighter Ray Ericksen notes, even if you love the game, "you can only play so much golf."

Work—with or without a paycheck—is rewarding psychologically and physically. It helps keep us alert and healthy. It provides structure for our days and helps us to define our identity. It helps sustain our feelings of self-worth, competence and confidence. Equally important, it provides a valuable network of friends and acquaintances.

Mukunda Rao, an international

consultant on social-development issues, believes it is time to rethink retirement at an arbitrary age.

"I think this idea of old age linked to retirement, with a sudden dropping-off from the workforce, is an unfortunate byproduct of the industrial revolution," he states in an interview in the Oct.-Nov. issue of *Modern Maturity*.

Forcing people to stop work simply because they have reached a certain age, he insists, wastes precious resources and human potential in today's marketplace—though that wasn't always the case.

When originated in the 1800s, the idea of retirement was intended to, in part, avoid waste of resources by forcing or encouraging out older, more expensive workers and bringing in younger, cheaper ones.

Since that time, life expectancies have changed, rising steadily upward, and the nature of work itself has changed in our evolving service economy.

Though many companies haven't redefined their ideas about retirement, retirees are doing it themselves. They're refusing to drop out, dry up or put their lives in "park" simply because their hair is graying.

If they must leave current employment, that doesn't have to mean leaving the workforce entirely.

These new retirees eye "retirement" not as an ending, but as a beginning, a chance to begin a new lifestyle or a new career, whether through years of advance planning or serendipity.

They may move back "home" or to a different part of the country where the climate is better or living is cheaper. They may take up golf or some other new hobby, travel, enroll in a local college for one class or a degree, or volunteer somewhere to help fill their newly-expanded leisure hours.

Frequently they go back to work. In fact, 25 percent to 30 percent of people retiring today will keep working, full- or part-time, either for someone else, or for themselves. They may work because they need additional income, to try a new career, because they are bored and want the challenge of a job part-time, or simply to meet new people and have fun.

Sennie Horton, Ray Ericksen, Claire Cheney and Jim and Barbara Lowell are just a few of the hundreds of men and women across Brunswick County who are helping to redefine what it means to be "retired" in the post-Industrial Revolution age.

### 'Dream Of A Lifetime'

At age 21 Leland native Sennie Gainey married Donald Horton, a manager with Amoco, and moved across the Cape Fear River to Wilmington.

It was the first of many moves



**AFTER TAKING RETIREMENT** Ray Ericksen was going stir crazy until he picked up his paint brushes and turnout gear again—by choice.

they would make over the next three decades. Raising six children, including one set of twins, they shuttled from Albany, N.T., to Vicksburg, Miss., then to Manessee, Pa., Harrisburg, Pa., and Johnsonville, N.Y., back again to Harrisburg and Wilmington, then finally Reading, Pa., for an incredible 14 years in one place.

With all the transfers, Sennie always knew deep down inside she would eventually come back to Brunswick County.

"My lifelong dream has been to get down here," she said from the casual comfort of an office offering a picturesque view of a landing off the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway.

Her dream was fueled by family vacations to Ocean Isle Beach that included her parents, the late former Mr. and Mrs. Dillon Gainey Sr. Gainey was a longtime sheriff of Brunswick County.

"We kept coming back every year on vacation," she recalls, first staying with her sister Frances and late brother-in-law, Shallotte Police Chief Sam West, and later renting a cottage at Ocean Isle Beach.

"Anybody who comes to this area ends up feeling the same way," she says, as evidenced by their own mushrooming beach reunion each August.

While her husband Don worked hard for Amoco those years, Sennie

found a variety of jobs, mostly in hospitals, mostly at the information desk. It was a natural fit. Gregarious and likeable, most people like her as much as she likes them.

In 1987 the Hortons built in Crown Creek, on the mainland across from Ocean Isle Beach, and in 1988 made the move—on May 21, their wedding anniversary.

Soon after returning to Brunswick County, though, full retirement began to wear a little thin. Sennie signed up for a real estate course at Brunswick Community College "simply to have something to do."

"I get lonesome for the kids—that's where working helps," she acknowledges.

"I like being around people and I enjoy helping people," she said. "That's why I'm in real estate. When I sell somebody something, I want them to be as happy in 10 years as they are now."

Working in real estate also allows her to adjust her work schedule for visits with children and grandchildren scattered from Florida to Pennsylvania. That's important, especially now with grandchildren No. 17 and 18 due this May and June.

In relating to new clients, Sennie frequently draws upon her own experiences living in other parts of the

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STAFF PHOTOS BY SUSAN USHER

**SENNIE HORTON** came home to enjoy the relaxed lifestyle of the South Brunswick Islands. A "retirement" career in real estate keeps her in touch with people and using knowledge and experiences gathered over a lifetime.



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