Editor’s Note: Richard is Director of Human Resources (Emeritus) for The College at Brockport (SUNY Brockport)

Except for a year as a bank teller and three years in the Marine Corps, I have been associated with the State University of New York as a student or a public servant since 1959 in roles as undergraduate student, graduate student, graduate intern, financial aid officer, personnel officer, interim facilities officer, consultant and volunteer. During those 52 years of association, the highest compensation I have ever received in any of these roles is for my work as a volunteer on behalf of emeriti/retirees. That compensation is the camaraderie I have enjoyed with a group of people with whom I have shared my career and my life.

While The College at Brockport, State University of New York, does not have a formally-established Emeriti/Retiree Club, it has in place many ways to communicate with emeriti/retirees, and to include them in the life of the campus.

In 1970, when I became Personnel Officer at Brockport, there were only a handful of retirees from the Normal School days. Yet I was impressed when one of them, a former art teacher and chair, the late Robert Skelton, frequently came by the office to pick up health insurance claim forms and other things for a couple of retirees who were housebound. I was impressed with his service commitment and noted it.

As Brockport continued to transform from a Teachers’ College to an Arts and Sciences College, the size of its retiree group started to grow and a couple of retirees, the late Marguerite “Peg” Hare Browne, formerly an outstanding educator; and the late Harold Rakov, formerly an exceptionally versatile professor and administrator, started working out of the president’s office to try to develop a few programs to provide service to retirees.

One outcome of their work in the 1980s was to establish an office in the library with equipment such as computers and printers where retirees could work in lieu of retaining scarce office space in their departments. While the creation of the Internet rendered this retiree perk obsolete (no longer utilized), it was a start. Around the same time I was prompted by two other retirees who were interested in preserving the history of the College and its relationship with retirees to create a database of retirees or their surviving spouses or family members. I did so and that database continues to be maintained today. The two prompters were retirees from the Education and Human Resources departments, Frances Moroney Whited and Jeanette D’Agostino Banker, who remain stalwart supporters of emeriti and alumni relations to this day.

Marguerite “Peg” Browne and Jeanette D’Agostino Banker had also convinced me in 1970, when I started my work in the Personnel Office to include a section for emeriti or their surviving spouses in the Faculty-Staff Directory when it was published each year. This, of course, was an invaluable resource in the days before computers as we began our efforts to stay connected to retirees.

One of the jobs created by including retirees in the directory was to ensure the accuracy of retiree information in the publication before it came out each year. This was accomplished by sending Brockport College retirees a note with the information we had in our files that requested them to reply if changes/corrections were necessary. As computer applications were developed, these notes were soon computer-generated.

By the mid-1990s, Brockport’s retiree population had become significant and I had the thought that it might be nice to include a letter outlining some things that were happening at the College with the annual request to update retiree directory information and I decided it would be nice to have students write the letter from their perspectives and to include a thank you to the retirees for their service that laid the foundation for what Brockport College had become. As you might imagine, the office received wonderful responses to this initiative and all retirees were appreciative of being brought closer into the loop. While most of them had been receiving copies of publications aimed at alums and copies of the Faculty Staff Directory, the personal attention...
they received in the form of personalized notes from students made the retirees feel more a part of the Brockport family.

As the Internet and email became readily available around that time, I decided to start building a database of retiree email addresses and use that vehicle for capturing their news and sharing it, as well as for sharing news about what was going on at the College. This has grown into an email distribution list of nearly 450 emeriti/retirees who receive an e-newsletter called (appropriately enough) “Update” periodically as events warrant (shared information of mutual interest, deaths of retirees, etc.). Unfortunately, as our retiree group has aged up, far too many “Updates” are now prompted for distribution by deaths.

In 2001, an emeriti website was created (http://www.acs.brockport.edu/~rmeade/emeriti.htm) as an outcome of my taking a web development course after retirement. The website contains links to pages of interest such as Brockport College News, Medicare, Social Security, the retirement programs, etc.; how the emeriti directory is maintained; some memorials and remembrances and a “Your News” link where many of the email “Updates” are posted then later edited to delete expired information or are removed altogether; and a listing of benefits and privileges currently available to emeriti/retirees.

Inclusiveness for emeriti/retirees was a hallmark of the presidency of John Halstead and his wife Kathy (2005-2015). Beginning with their first year at Brockport they hosted a well-attended annual emeriti reception at their home each fall. While emeriti/retirees have always been invited to campus events, under the Halsteads’ leadership there were many special events planned just for emeriti such as preview tours of new buildings (e.g. the Special Events and Recreation Center as well as the Liberal Arts Building) and presentations about the future of the College and Higher Education, usually followed by luncheons. Emeriti/retirees extended a lot of gratitude to the Halsteads for their service to emeriti and for their extension of emeriti benefits and privileges to other retirees during their tenure at Brockport.

Emeriti and retirees are also grateful to Roxanne Johnston, Senior Development Officer and former Vice President for Advancement, and to Mike Andriatch, former Associate Vice President for Leadership and Planned Giving and current Vice President for Advancement, as well as their staff for following the Halsteads’ lead in ensuring that emeriti/retirees continue to be a part of the College community and welcome participants in all that the College has to offer.

As an emeritus looking back over 52 years of association with SUNY, and in particular with the staff and retirees at Brockport, I count myself very lucky to be able to continue relationships well into retirement. People make a difference and I strongly encourage SUNY retirees to keep in touch with other people – including their former colleagues and institutions – as it has been proven that, not only are such connections enjoyable, they are beneficial to maintaining mental and physical health.

Stay connected via your campus or other organizations such as the SUNY Retirees Service Corps (www.suny.edu/retirees/).