Some Ideas for Establishing and Maintaining a Local Retiree Organization

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Editor’s Note:
The mission of the SUNY Retirees Service Corps (RSC), which publishes the SUNY Retirees Newsletter, is to promote a strong “retiree-campus-community” connection within and among the SUNY campuses. The Newsletter is an excellent forum for information on the mechanics of starting a campus retiree program or organization and on the working of similar programs at other institutions. The Spring/Summer 2016 issue featured a profile of the Retirees Association of Suffolk Community College (RASCC). Below, Peter Herron, who conceived the RASCC in 2002, provides a guide for SUNY retirees who are interested in undertaking a similar endeavor.

It is hoped that the following list will be of use to those who are about to begin the task of establishing a retiree organization at their campus. The list was made upon the reflection of what it took to get the Retirees Association of Suffolk Community College (RASCC) up and running.

1. Core group of retirees who want to remain connected to their college.
2. Institutional support (retiree contact data, stationery, copying, postage, etc.).
3. Support of all local unions.
4. Invite retirees to social events, preferably at a college campus and with food, to introduce the retirees to the concept of a retiree organization.
5. Membership should be inclusive (administrators, faculty, and support staff).
6. Establish good communication with the college's human resources office, administration, and all unions. This will help in learning who is planning to retire and provide the opportunity to inform the new retiree of the benefits of retiree organization membership. The retiree organization can only grow if it gets most new retirees to join.
7. Get members to do as much of the work as possible (copying, data entry, envelope stuffing, etc.); this will help renew old friendships and make new ones.
8. Retirees should be encouraged to volunteer at many college activities, especially fund raisers.
9. Many retiree organization activities should be coordinated with college events.
10. When possible, the organization should coordinate its activities with other local organizations.
11. It is essential that the college community is aware of the existence of the retiree organization.
12. Take every opportunity to let everyone know that the retiree organization exists and is a positive force for the total college and local community.
13. Use email to remind members of upcoming activities and events.
14. Establish a newsletter, a website, and a Facebook page. Communicating with members and the college community is essential. Keep members informed by keeping the website and Facebook page constantly updated. Unfortunately, many retirees rarely check their email and are even less likely to visit the website. This is why a newsletter is essential. The website and Facebook page require action by the viewer in order to be effective. A newsletter comes in the mail (or email) without any action on the part of the reader. The recipient is most likely to read the newsletter if it is attractive and informative.
15. Most information should be posted on the retiree organization website and via a short emailed notice to members encouraging them to go to the website for more detailed information on planned events.
16. The retiree organization’s website and newsletter should be used to highlight activities of its members. For example books authored by members, art exhibits by members, deaths of members, recent retirees, etc.
17. Distribute the newsletter to key people throughout the college community.
18. The retiree organization must be a conduit for information pertinent to retirees. Using the website, Facebook, newsletter and meetings, the retiree organization must provide current information on changes in the local health insurance plan; services provided to seniors by local governments and other agents; information on opportunities for retirees to volunteer their time, energy and talents; cultural and educational opportunities for seniors, etc.
19. Many retirees do not live locally. The retiree organization must make every effort to keep these retirees in the loop. Special effort must be made to encourage these members to contribute to the newsletter and the website. Information readily available to locals must be put into the newsletter and posted on the website so that non-local retirees feel membership in the retiree organization provides them with essential benefits.
20. Distribute a membership directory annually. The directory will enable retiree organization members to reestablish connections with former colleagues who are dispersed throughout the United States.