In 2005, Shirley Phillips, then-Executive Director of the Westchester Community College (WCC) Foundation and John Fellas, Director of Operations, attended a SUNY/CUAD conference and heard an administrator speak about a newsletter her college had mailed to all its retired faculty members. When they returned, they floated the idea of publishing a newsletter for WCC retirees. I had been producing a semiannual alumni newsletter for the past ten years, so they asked me to create a four-page publication containing material that would be of interest to retired faculty, staff and administrators. That’s how “Ink-Link” came into being.

The first issue of Ink-Link was printed in February 2006. It contained stories about major events at the college, as well as articles about the activities of several retirees. It listed upcoming college events which we hoped would draw retirees back to the campus, and the names of the people who had retired recently. Somber news about retirees who had passed away was balanced by photos of smiling retirees getting together for lunch. And finally, most important of all, there was an invitation to readers to submit news and articles about themselves for the next issue.

That first Ink-Link newsletter was mailed to approximately 190 retirees for whom we still had current addresses in our data base. The response was immediate and positive. We got phone calls and e-mails from retirees who had left the college years before telling us how happy they were to be remembered in this way, and we received nine written updates for publication in our next issue!

Since then, Ink-Link has been published regularly three times a year, and it seems to get more popular as time goes by. We are now in our seventh year and our mailing list contains over 300 names and continues to grow as more people retire and we rediscover our “lost” retirees.

The success of Ink-Link inspired us to step up our efforts to engage our retirees and renew their connection with Westchester Community College. One of the best lessons we learned is that retiree events and alumni events just naturally go together.

For the past 15 years we had held an annual Alumni Holiday Party on campus. We thought it would be a good idea to also have a holiday party for our retirees to get them back on campus in a fun social setting. The first two years were moderately successful as far as retiree attendance, but it was pretty hectic for us, since we also had the alumni party a few days before.

Then in 2008, we had to cancel the Retiree Holiday Party due to snow, so we invited all the retirees to come to the Alumni Party. Well, things just haven’t been the same since. There was so much energy in the room that evening as former students reconnected with the teachers and staff members who had helped to prepare them for their careers that we have never gone back to holding two separate holiday parties. We changed the name of the event to “Holiday Homecoming,” and last year’s party drew more than 130 alumni and retirees. We expect our Holiday Homecoming to be even bigger this year as word gets out that it is a “can’t-miss” event.

Another of our largest alumni events has also proven to be a natural attraction for our retired professors. For the past 15 years, we have held a reunion of our 50-year graduates on the day of graduation. We treat our 50th Anniversary grads to cocktails and an early dinner, and then we get them into caps and gowns and they are given the honor of marching at the head of the commencement procession. It is a memorable occasion for those who attend.

Last year, since there had been such a natural chemistry between alumni and retirees at the Holiday Homecoming, we decided to try and include retirees in the fiftieth reunion of the class of 1961. We invited two retired professors who had actually taught at the College in 1961. When the alumni arrived for their reunion, they were amazed and thrilled to be greeted by two of their teachers from fifty years ago! It is difficult to say who was more emotional—the alumni or the professors. It doesn’t matter—retirees will definitely be included in our planning for all upcoming 50th Anniversary Celebrations.

In our ongoing efforts to bring Westchester Community College’s retirees back to the place that was their second home for so many years, we at the WCC Foundation think we have found a formula that works.