

The Media Center
Working Retired: Part 1, Refocused and Recharged

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Need help with personal or small business web site hosting or development, Macintosh training, or video/DVD production? John, a former Minnesota school media specialist with a lot of creativity and great tech skills will help. How about booking an author or purchasing a gift basket that contains a book? Sharron, a former Iowa media specialist with a passion for literacy will assist. John and Sharron are two of many former media specialists thriving and with second career. They are typical of a growing category of “higher-income older workers who, according to pollster Mark Penn, “tend to become consultants and independent contractors, either in the field they once mastered or in a hobby they love.”* Like other “retired” professionals, they are likely to run their own show and bring passion to their new endeavors.

Media specialists have useful and unique skill sets that can serve them well if they want to continue working when they leave their K12 jobs. They are multimedia creators and producers, writers, speakers, university instructors, online instructors, educational consultants and leaders, and volunteers for the professional organizations they belong to. They work with print and technology; they use their organizational, teaching, communications and advocacy skills. They are excited and passionate about their work.

Production: From filmstrips to DVD's and web sites

Tadpolemedia.com was a natural for John who enjoys learning and teaching others. His web sites and training are an affordable solution for small businesses in Minnesota's resort country. His hobby keeps his mind active and provides a small profit he uses to purchase whatever hardware and software he wishes. He loves being able to develop a website for a northern Minnesota resort while vacationing in Texas and work when he wants too.

Oxcart Productions is the 2nd production company started by Lyn Lacy and Helen Stub. The former Minneapolis media specialists have combined their interests in technology and children's literature for over 30 years. Their first company, Heritage Productions was created in the early 1980's to produce filmstrips about Minnesota authors and illustrators for children. The duo started Oxcart to transfer their old filmstrips to DVDs and develop new educational resources. Their home based company now has 11 DVD biographies and stories. Along the way they have learned the “intricacies of *Photoshop*, *Final Cut*, *Toast*, website design, finance and marketing” while applying their skills as scriptwriters and researchers. They are developing an educational board game about the Santa Fe Trail, as well as DVD productions of other historic American trails. Learn more about these energetic life-long learners at <http://www.oxcartproductions.com/>.

Phyllis Anker “surfs the Internet and subscribes to several educational newsletters to find sites that . . .educators might find useful.” Phyllis' Favorites grew out of the sharing she did as a high school librarian. Phyllis sends links with descriptions to a daily distribution list and posts them on her blog. < <http://phyllisfavorites.blogspot.com/> > The Central Jersey Regional Library Cooperative has archived her links since 2001 < <http://www.cjrlc.org/Newsletter/Archives/archiveindex.html>>

Writing and speaking

Departure from the K12 sector provides media specialists with the time to write that book they've always wanted to write, for those who have been writing for years, time to write more books. Sharron McElmeel has authored more than 20 books, a career that grew out of her passion for literacy. She began by writing book reviews while still a full-time educator. Sharron explained “creating suggestions for how classroom teachers could integrate real books into their classrooms and their curriculum while reaching legitimate goals and standards for their classrooms spawned my first commercial writing contract.” She also taught college courses, and implemented special book related projects for her district. Her goal was “creating all types of opportunities to connect literacy and the community.” When she was in a position to take financial risks she shifted her work proportions so she could follow her passion full time. Her passion became Mcbookwords.com/, a speaking and writing business and a booking agency for authors. Sharron also develops web sites for authors and maintains an extensive collection of author web site links. < <http://www.mcelmeel.com/curriculum/authorlinks/index.html> > She also is a partner in an Internet business to develop and sell gift

packages (baskets) that have an Iowa connection. One option for every package is to add a book. “Thus, we are able to meld together my passion for literacy and my more recent inert in putting Iowa in the spotlight.”

Ann Bell, formerly from Iowa and now living in Texas, also combines her writing and speaking skills. She has published two books on technology and has a book on Web 2.0 in schools in progress. Ann also speaks on web 2.0 and other technology related topics at state and national conferences, Ann describes her special skills as bringing “my writing skills to my job as well as well as the excitement for exploring new methods of applying technology to the classroom in order to increase student learning. It is exciting to watch teachers take their new skills obtained from professional development courses and apply them to their own classrooms.” Ann doesn’t just write about technology; she has authored several Christian fiction novels and uses her writing experience to publish writing tips in her blog < <http://annbell.wordpress.com/> `

Helen Adams from rural Wisconsin is a past-president of AASL. She is currently writing a book on intellectual freedom and access to school library programs and services, like Sharron she became a published author while she was still working in the K-12 environment.

Other former media specialists who write are New Jersey resident Hilda Weisberg author of *New on the Job, A School Librarian’s Guide to Success* and, Gail Petri who developed two books on The American Memory Collections and using primary sources in the classroom. Hilda is also the co-author of *The School Librarian’s Workshop* newsletter.

Online Teaching: A Natural

If you need to get something done find a busy person. Adams, McElmeel, and Bell, as well as many other former media specialists I interviewed, are also online instructors. Writing fuels teaching and teaching fuels writing. Helen planned ahead for leaving her K12 job by creating a “bridge into retirement,” a halfway point between fulltime employment and fulltime leisure. The state universities where she had been an adjunct instructor were not hiring so she sought out other teaching opportunities. She taught online for Drexel University and now teaches “Access and Legal Issues for Mansfield University.”

Sharron’s love and knowledge of children’s and young adult literature are the basis for two courses she teaches for the University of Wisconsin-Stout; Ann shares her knowledge of digital tools and web 2.0 by also teaching online courses for UW-Stout. Fellow Iowan Becky Mather began her career as a media specialist and most recently worked as an instructional technology consultant at a regional education agency. She is now a full-time as an online instructor and course developer for UW-Stout, another natural for media specialists with a background in teaching and instructional design.

Online teaching is well suited for people who travel or have multiple homes. Jo Dervan lives in New Jersey and Florida while teaching courses on media specialist/ teacher collaboration for UW-Stout. Jo has been teaching online since 2001 after first taking an online course. She stayed in touch with her instructor who later asked her to “assist with a course and then take over the course as the only instructor.” The rest, of course, is history, as Jo continues to apply her teaching skills and learn about cultures abroad as she comes in contact with online students who do not live in the United States.

Higher Education Leadership

Higher education offers diverse opportunities. Deb Kachel is now the Instructor & Scholarship Director, School Library & Information Technologies Graduate School for Mansfield University’s online program. She uses her writing and leadership skills to “write federal and state grants for the New Jersey University that brings in scholarship money for our program. . . . They have given over 100 students the ability to earn a MS in our field that they otherwise could not have afforded A grant “ now under consideration is to partner with our state Department of Education and work with 35 corrective action schools (schools that have not made AYP in over four years) librarians to help improve their students performance in learning. “

Pam Cheskey works for International Scholarship in School Libraries (CISSL) located Rutgers University, School of Communication, Information and Library Studies. She works on fund raising, special events, identifying and setting up meetings with stakeholders, and professional development for CISSL. Her work as a Supervisor of School Libraries, Strategic Planning, Technology and Art in a large New Jersey suburban school district put her in a good position to work with the New Jersey Department of Education, vendors and other professionals that has been helpful in her work with CISSL.

Sharing their knowledge

Providing workshops and consulting are also a natural post K12 career. One Minnesotan is an educational consultant and e-learning manager for a telecommunications cooperative. The organization is a telecommunications school district started to provide ITV courses to the 26 school districts. The diverse job includes organizing online and video courses for high schools setting up regional contracts for Internet resources like *United Streaming* and *Net Trekker*, training teachers in the use of *Moodle*, and representing the organization at state meetings involving technology in schools. He finds his work is much like the work he did in a district-wide position and enjoys it “immensely because of the people [he works] with and the joy of helping teachers and their students work with technology.

Hilda Weisberg also keeps busy conducting workshops. “Someone asked me to do a 90 minute presentation for one of our Regional Library Cooperatives; it turned into two 90-minute workshops. They were so successful another Regional Library Cooperatives booked me and then the first one asked for more, some school districts are also picking up on this.”

What media specialist wouldn't consider conducting workshops for the Library of Congress to be a special opportunity? When I first met Gail Petri she was an elementary media specialist in New York. She now works as an Education Resource Specialist for the Library of Congress American Memory Program Gail develops teaching activities and resources that utilize the vast richness of the digital American Memory collections and conducts workshops and seminars throughout the United States. Gail's exciting job is more than she ever imagined when she part the part-time job in 2002. “The one thing I do know is that taking a chance and saying yes to a part-time job out of state has changed my life.”

There is much to do and media specialists who take advantage of continuing opportunities to use their energy and talent have much to offer. In part II we'll learn more as we look building that bridge to retirement and what these busy folks have learned in their second careers.

*Penn, Mark. *Working Retired: the small forces behind tomorrow's big changes*, Hachette Book Group, 2007.

Mary Alice Anderson is a contributor to professional journals and available as a conference and workshop presenter. She is the Lead Media Specialist for Winona Area Public Schools in Minnesota and is an online adjunct instructor with the Online Professional Development for Educators Program in the School of Education at University of Wisconsin—Stout. She received a Top Online Educator recognition from SurfAcquarium. Her personal Web site can be found at <http://www.homepage.mac.com/Maryalicea/Sites/Anderson/Anderson.html>. Communications to the author may be sent to maryalicea@mac.com.