

The Media Center
Working Retired Part 2: Building a Bridge to Retirement
Mary Alice Anderson, Lead Media Specialist
Winona Area Public Schools
Winona MN
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In the May/June column we heard from media specialists who are refocused and recharged in their 2nd careers. They are busy with writing, speaking, online teaching, consulting and multimedia production. In Part II we will learn how these accomplished people built a bridge to retirement and what they have to say about all they've learned in their new careers.

Active membership in a professional media organization is key to building that bridge to retirement. The former media specialists interviewed for this article were involved in their state professional organizations while they were fully employed; many were also active nationally. They served as committee chairs, state officers and held many leadership posts vital to establishing contacts and acquiring skills and attitudes that help them now. Most importantly, they established contacts and made relationships with people they now work with in their new careers. Sharron McElmeel, online instructor, author and speaker wrote: "So all the while I was building my public school career as a library media specialist, I was also planting the seeds of what was to come - I used my research skills to expand my personal goals of building a nation of readers, one family, one community, one state at a time. So for twenty plus years I have been doing what I am doing now -- only in different proportions."

Pam Cheskey's multi-faceted positions in the New Jersey Association of School Librarians helped her get started in a rewarding new career. "About two months before my retirement was to take effect, I received a call from Dr. Carol Kuhlthau asking if I would be interested in working with Rutgers's University School of Communication, Information and Library Studies...of course I did not hesitate to say yes. This is the dream job for a school library media specialist. " Cheskey's professional contacts have helped her reach out for support and in setting goals of for CISSL and establish partnerships within the library world both in NJ and other states. Gail Petri's dream job with the Library of Congress began with contacts she made as an American Memory Fellow.

Deb Kachel and Ann Bell both began teaching in online programs while fully employed in K-12 education. Deb decided to retire when Mansfield University "was asking me to do more and there didn't seem to be enough hours in the days. I felt like I was working two jobs; after 33 years in the school district, I decided that I wanted the freedom to do the jobs I wanted to do and could do while I still had the drive, skills, and good health. Ann Bell started online teaching in baby steps; she decided to expand her online role once she had retired and more time. *As soon as I retired, I proposed a new class" that will first be offered Summer Semester 2008* It never hurts to proactively share your ideas for future employment.

Relations in the community can help pave the way to jobs at local colleges and universities as instructors in Colleges of Education or instructors in custom training programs at Technical Colleges. Established associations with museums can also lead to 2nd careers. Walt, a former science teacher who also has a degree in school media works as a cataloger archivist for our county historical society.

Virtual connections through discussion groups such as LM_NET < http://www.eduref.org/lm_net/> blogs, or social networking sites such Teacher Librarian-NING < <http://teacherlibrarian.ning.com/>> offer exciting possibilities for establishing relationships. A virtual presence keeps you in touch and tells others that you are there. Keep your resume and vitae current. My online teaching career began with a brief contact on LM_NET. We never know what opportunities exist!

Writing and speaking while still working as a school media specialist help build bridges to retirement. Sharron McElmeel wrote, "*It would be hard to have a writing career, for example, at this time if one had not started writing 20 years ago to build a reputation. Same with author visits etc. I can make deals because I have 20 years of contacts.* It's all about visibility.

There is much to learn in a new career, a feature appeals to life-long learners. Multimedia producer Lyn Lacy has learned "The joy of sharing interests. It is hard to sell products. Above all doing something you believe in, disseminating knowledge, hands on experiences involving important historical issues. " People who write about issues related to school media programs may find it challenging to keep up with some topics now they do not have hands-on experience as practitioners. But it also gives them a new perspective that they can share. A new career is also a time to reflect on a previous career as Pam Cheskey noted. One important concept that I have learned through CISSL is that it is not "advocacy skills" that we need to learn to share the message of our profession. It is the understanding that school librarians have a direct impact on student learning. Advocacy is only a superficial means of advancing "us."

Retirees who teach online must keep up with the rapid growth in online learning and new course delivery systems. Those who maintain blogs or work with multimedia also must keep up with technology and the intricacies of applications such as Photoshop, Dream Weaver, Final Cut, Imovie or website design. Lyn Lacy advised networking “with others doing similar work, maybe even form partnerships. Work at something you love. Build new skills, not just rely on your past skills, even if it means taking a class! Investing in new hardware and software will help you advance.

On the nitty-gritty side, you may have to learn about establishing a business and handling finances differently. Lacy learned that starting a small company is not all that difficult but she had to learn how to pay city and state sales tax, submit business income taxes, and get state and federal ID numbers. “We must have annual meetings complete with financial statements.” Another working retiree advised “considering delaying retirement payments until you need them. In some cases you can be penalized for earning over a certain amount. Develop a spreadsheet of your expected income from teacher retirement and social security for yourself and your spouse as well as health insurance costs. Compute that income and cost from your age at retirement on into your 70's or 80's. You might be surprised at what you find.”

Flexibility to work as much as you want and where you want are big perks of many 2nd careers. For many it means working as much time as they permit themselves; sometimes only 5-6 hours a week; other times 20-40 or even 80. The Internet, email and Skype make work and communication easy from almost any location. An important new skill for one individual is finding a balance between time “between work and retirement activities. Since my consulting is paid on an hourly basis, I must stay on task and track all of the time I work. I work mostly from a home office so it is easy to work at times in a 24/7 environment.”

Second careers are not for everyone. A friend who thought she would do consulting found it just wasn't for her. “I wanted to reconnect with people I had worked with before, but “it didn't meet my expectations. I wouldn't do it again.” She also found it caused tax problems and the money she earned wasn't worth the necessary paperwork. Instead, she maintains her contacts by following her passion and doing volunteer work for her state's professional media organization.

Many active “doers” maintain contacts and continue learning without earning an income. Former leaders in the Wisconsin and Minnesota media organizations continue their support, lending expertise as speakers and advocates, fund-raisers, and conference worker bees. Deb Kachel earns money teaching, but also volunteers as the “Legislative Chairperson for the New Jersey School Library Association. “Now that I am retired, I regularly visit our state capital and talk to legislators and attend the National Legislative Day in Washington, DC. There is so much important work that needs to be done that SLMS who are required to be on the job each workday cannot do. I am trying to organize retirees to lobby our legislators.” These volunteers have assumed one of the most important jobs of all: role model.

John, the web site producer in northern Minnesota, volunteered in a school media center and maintains the school web site, a job he can do from anywhere. Jo Dervan's retirement took her from New Jersey to Florida and she now adds “library volunteer” to her online teaching resume. “It was interesting being in the school as a volunteer but I do not regret my decision to retire.” Ken, a Minnesota retiree has devoted countless hours helping establish a new media center at the charter school his grandchildren attend.

Other types of organizations can benefit from our unique skills media specialists. Sharron McElmeel uses her discretionary time to choose 2-3 charitable projects a year that she can commit to. One year she used her photography skills to document an extensive collection of over 900 pieces of original art work from children's books in the local library.

There is life after retirement, a thought shared by so many. Their advice for future retirees?

- *When it comes to making the "big decision" to retire...be sure you are making it for the right reasons. Everyone says you know when it is time... that is so true! If you have something to fill in, a way of staying in touch with the profession, you have the best of both worlds! For me, it was important to stay involved. (A consultant)*
- *Why stop a lifetime of service? It is joyful to produce things and it keeps you from getting to be an old fuddy-duddy (Lacy)*
- *Always continue being a life-long learner. It's even more exciting in retirement because you have more time to explore areas you've always wanted to discover and try (Bell)*
- *Look for work that is not necessarily an offshoot of being a school media specialist. McElmeel suggests private investigator or famous writer's research assistant. There is no age ceiling there. We “can create their own glorious wonderful path in this world, if one is willing to level the ground, spread the gravel, shovel the snow in the winter, and plant the wildflowers along the ditches, in the summer.*

- *Follow your passion. (Mather)*

1. Start building a bridge to retirement early
2. Develop and maintain contacts
3. Develop a web site/blog/Ning presence
4. Write for professional publication
5. Promote yourself with create business cards and publicity documents
6. Hone your skills; learn new skills
7. Keep your resume and vita up to date
8. Trust your instincts
9. Honor your life long passions
10. Ask people to hire you

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 Top Online Educator recognition from SurfAcquarium in 2006. 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.