

Two steps towards successful aging

Question: My wife recently retired and I will be moving towards my own retirement at the end of the year. We have worked hard over the years to prepare financially for the golden years, yet I am still apprehensive about what we can do to keep ourselves happy and healthy in the years to come. What does your office advise seniors do to prepare for retirement?

Answer: One of the most challenging and sometimes daunting preparations for retirement is getting one's financial affairs in order, so it sounds like you and your wife are ahead of the game. There are indeed other things to consider when planning for retirement that will help you make the most of the years to come.

When your retirement date finally arrives you may find that sleeping in, various hobbies and catching up on pleasure reading begin to lose appeal after a time. The best thing that you can do for yourself is to keep busy. After spending a lifetime working, many people find themselves at a loss with their new free time. The best thing that you can do is find a new purpose.

Over the last several years I have gotten to meet some of the busiest folks in South Carolina – retired seniors. They have taken the drive and work ethic that made them productive workers and applied it to volunteerism. Whether they are packing and delivering meals for homebound seniors, mentoring at-risk youth or advocating for senior interests with law makers, these folks are making a difference.

In challenging economic times volunteers make a huge difference for many non-profits and government agencies. According to a recent research brief by the Corporation for National and Community Service, this trend of older volunteerism should grow in the years to come as members of the Baby Boom reach retirement age. As nearly 77 million individuals born between 1946 and 1964 retire, there will be a wealth of manpower available to the volunteer pool, bringing high levels of education, experience, skills and enthusiasm to the aging network.

I am fortunate to have two retirees that help me with constituent services at the Lt. Governor's Office in the Statehouse. My former high school economics teacher Tom Lain and retired Department of Consumer Affairs counselor Alice Brown each come into my office once a week to help me respond to the numerous of calls, letters and emails we receive each week. They make a huge contribution to my staff during a tough economy – the time that they volunteer is priceless to me and those that we serve. In fact on her first day on the job, Alice was able to help a constituent recover nearly \$100,000 in workers compensation benefits that they had been trying to get for months – not a bad first day.

Another important step to aging gracefully is living a healthy lifestyle. This is one of my passions, and I enjoy carrying the message of proper nutrition and exercise to seniors on a regular basis. Countless studies have shown that simple lifestyle changes like daily exercise and changing eating habits can reduce the need for medical care allowing seniors to maintain their independence and dignity.

One of the ways that I am encouraging this is by promoting the Lt. Governor's Challenge – Your Heart is in Your Hands campaign in South Carolina. The Lieutenant Governors' Challenge is part of a nationwide program sponsored by the National Lt. Governor's Association.

Participants in the 12-week program earn points by doing everyday activities like walking or housework. Each person who meets the point goals receives a medal showing their commitment to healthy living. I have expanded the scope of the program here to include a series of wellness walks held in area malls in addition to the online interactive program developed by the National Lt. Governors Association.

As more and more Baby Boomers reach retirement age, your concerns will be echoed across South Carolina and our country as a whole. It is vital that we recognize the challenges of a graying society now so the age wave does not knock us off of our feet.

I recently recognized the South Carolina Aging in Place Coalition www.scaipc.org of Charleston for their efforts in helping seniors age gracefully in their own homes. I hope that I will see similar groups develop throughout South Carolina in the future, ensuring that senior interests are kept in focus.

Staying active, both mentally and physically, will go a long way towards helping seniors enjoy their retirement. If you are interested on more information on volunteerism or the various health and wellness programs offered by the Lt. Governor's Office on Aging, visit the website www.aging.sc.gov or feel free to call my staff at 800-868-9095.