

Retired? Volunteer your time and skills in your local community

John Hughes

I have enjoyed reading all of the anecdotes and advice given by colleagues about preparing for retirement and enjoying a fulfilling retirement.

I retired at the end of 2010 and have been involved in casual work for the Department and the Australian Catholic University. My wife and I are very much involved in pursuing our exercise and recreation through our enjoyment of line dancing. As well as conducting our own classes, we have travelled to many parts of Australia over many years, both before and after retirement, to pursue line dancing. Now in retirement we can do this travel in a far more relaxed fashion, extend our travel time and take in much more on our way to and from the venues.

Casual work, travel, exercise and recreation are very much part of my retirement.

However, there is one area that has played a large part in fulfilling my retirement but has not received a lot of attention in other articles I have read so far. That is the area of volunteering **within your local community**.

Let me tell you my story, briefly, and then I will list some of the advantages of volunteering in your local community based on my experiences.

Please note, although my main experience is through involvement with Lions, this is not an advertisement for 'Lionism'. There are many service groups and charities out there that would benefit from your knowledge, time and skills as well as helping you to lead a fulfilling retirement.

The Lions Club of Ryde was a wonderful support for many students at Ryde Secondary College during my time as Principal. Each year they presented two scholarships for needy and worthy students to pursue senior school and university respectively. Year 11 students were involved in the Youth of the Year competition and I attended as a guest each year. I was asked on several occasions to join the Lions Club while I was Principal but felt I could not devote the time to be involved as much as I would like. So, once I retired, I was only too happy to become a member of the club.

As a member of the club I was able to remain involved with the Ryde Secondary College school community through the scholarships and Youth of the Year and be involved in supporting the wider community as well. I used my skills and became secretary of the club for three years. We raised money to support local people in need, such as supplying special walking frames for children with cerebral palsy, assisting young people to pursue sporting and cultural goals and providing access and mobility equipment for older locals with mobility issues.

When we moved from our home in Sydney to our beautiful home in Hawks Nest, I was able to transfer from Ryde Lions to the Lions Club of Tea Gardens and immediately met new people and got to know the local community in a short space of time. I have been President of the club for the last two years and involved with many community support initiatives through the local primary school, Lions Youth of the Year program, PCYC, Men's Shed, retirement villages, community clinic bus (of which I am President as well), and my BBQ skills have increased dramatically – especially with regards to bacon and egg rolls and sausage sandwiches.

I initiated a \$500 high school assistance grant to a worthy and needy student from the local primary school and encouraged the Year 6 Student Parliament to conduct a term two collection of used eyeglasses to support the Lions 'Recycle for Sight' program. The students have collected over 800 pairs of used eyeglasses from the local community over the last two years.

Just in the last few weeks we have moved to the Central Coast to be closer to our family in Sydney. I have transferred to the local Lions Club, have been made to feel welcome and met many members of the local community already.

That is my story to date. I tell it only to show some of the things that can be done when you volunteer within your local community and to encourage you to become involved. There are many more things that can be achieved and many opportunities to become involved.

So, what can you gain from local community volunteering in retirement? It really depends on how far you want to take it in terms of the time you have to devote to the tasks:

- You get to know your community and the people in the community very quickly and can support them in many ways.
- If you happen to move from one community to another you can become part of the new community in a short space of time.
- If you are willing to take on the role of President in a community club or group then the leadership skills you have developed as Principal can be put to excellent use.
- Other roles such as Treasurer, Secretary and Public Officer also allow you to use appropriate skills.
- The most rewarding aspect I have found is that you can become involved with the local school/s and continue to help develop the young people in your community. I have found that Principals are only too happy to have ideas presented for the students to learn about volunteering and become involved in the local community, and they welcome the input and support from a retired Principal.
- It is a very rewarding way to use any spare time you may have.

I encourage you to get out there and see how you can become involved and how much of a difference you can make.

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