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Work Still Does a Body Good

If playing golf just isn't enough, get a job

Sometimes, retirement doesn't look like retirement. Five years ago, Howard Parker left the architectural firm he co-founded in 1961, aiming to become more involved in community activities. Today, Parker, 72, heads a committee of about 16 younger members of the American Institute of Architects' Dallas chapter, focusing on improving conditions in a densely populated, low-income neighborhood. "It has been a very rewarding experience," Parker says. "Because I'm an architect, I see many opportunities to use my skills."

Parker is typical of a new breed of retiree--the kind who doesn't stop working. Thanks to increasing longevity and better health, older people are more active than ever. For many, that means continuing to use the skills they've honed over long, productive careers. Some are paid: Almost 13% of the labor force consisted of people age 65 and older in 2000, up from 10.8% in 1985, says the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Still, most volunteer.

Indeed, money is seldom the main motivator. Some 90% of retirees work primarily to keep active rather than to earn income, according to a recent Cornell University study. "Most people go back to work for the social interaction and to feel productive," says Bill Coleman, senior vice-president for compensation at Salary.com, a Wellesley (Mass.) company that publishes information about compensation.

Staying mentally as well as physically active in later years can also keep you younger. "When you continue to do new things, you're making new connections in your brain and keeping it more dynamic," says Dr. Guy McKhann, professor of neurology and neuroscience at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. Recent studies have shown a relationship between sustained mental activity and delayed onset of Alzheimer's disease.

If you're willing to donate your services, the choices are great. Opportunities exist in everything from professional associations and university-run programs to nonprofits and government-sponsored agencies. Since it's hard to know where to start, you should first decide what it is you hope to gain. Do you want to work with others in your profession? Do you want to teach? Do you want to be involved in social issues you feel strongly about?

Charles Killian, 72, is a case in point. He retired nine years ago as environmental control director and manager of external affairs at Boston-based DuPont NEN Research Products, which makes radioactive chemicals for scientists. One of his many functions had been to train employees, police, and firefighters in handling radioactive material.

Looking to use his knowledge and skills as a scientist and trainer, he applied to RE-SEED, a volunteer program at Northeastern University that places retired scientists and mathematicians in middle schools to help teachers. After 65 hours of training, Killian now teaches three sixth-grade science classes one day a week at Martin Luther King Jr. Middle School in Dorchester, Mass. "I get a lot of enjoyment out of working with these kids," says Killian, who also trains new RE-SEED recruits.

The chance to be around young people is a big draw for many retirees. That's part of the

rationale for a new program at the Institute for Creative Aging at William Paterson University in Wayne, N.J. The institute's Students of Life program assigns 24 older adults as mentors to undergraduate and graduate students. Volunteers combine their professional skills with counseling and emotional support. One 80-year-old retired speech teacher helped a football player about to fail a public speaking course--and be thrown off the team. After four sessions with his mentor, the student was able to pass the course.

TROUBLESHOOTERS. Another avenue is to become involved in a professional association or nonprofit. Like Howard Parker, you can stick close to your specific area of expertise. Or you can draw on the business knowledge you developed through your career.

When 70-year-old Jim Sugrue retired six years ago as a human-resources manager with United Parcel Service ([UPS](#)), he threw himself into volunteer work at the Highbridge Community Life Center in the Bronx (N.Y.). His work at the center-- which provides adult education, counseling, and other services to residents of the low-income area--has little to do with human resources, however. Instead, he and fellow UPS retiree Art McEwen, 68, helped the group apply for foundation funding and set up an internship program for law students with their alma mater, Fordham University. "I'm making use of all my management skills," he says. "I was trained to define a problem and fix it, and that's what I do here."

Government-funded programs also offer a wealth of opportunities. The National Service Corps' Retired & Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) places people in 1,300 programs nationwide, based on their expertise and interests. The grandparent of government programs is Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE). Started in 1964, it deploys volunteers to act as advisers to entrepreneurs, counseling them on everything from how to write a business plan to where to get funding.

Jerald Jensen, 68, former director of management information systems for Bechtel, started volunteering at the SCORE chapter in San Jose, Calif., six years ago. Now he's also district director for the Silicon Valley chapter, which includes San Jose, San Francisco, and Oakland. His counseling ranges from one-shot advice sessions to long-term relationships where, he says, "it's almost like being at work again." For a year and a half, Jensen worked with a struggling business to help update its information-processing system, interviewing employees, taking an inventory of equipment, and putting together a new system with donations from Hewlett-Packard ([HWP](#)) and Microsoft ([MSFT](#)).

Jensen also volunteers with the Software Development Forum, another group that advises would-be entrepreneurs. That's not unusual. Retired executives often lend their services to more than one organization.

Take Charles Killian, who is chairman of the Governor's Advisory Council on Radiation Protection, a member of the Massachusetts Nuclear Incident Advisory Emergency Response team, and an adviser to Newmarket Business, which counsels small-business owners. "My first year of retirement, I played a lot of golf," he says. "But I don't have time for that anymore." Maybe next time Killian retires, he will.

By Anne Field