

States of

RETIREMENT

by Carrie Abner

A generation ago, retirement meant slowing down for most older adults—spending hours on the front porch swing, working crossword puzzles and playing the occasional game of Bingo.

That was then, THIS IS NOW.

“It’s one of the great success stories of not only our country, but around the world, that people can be expected to live 20 or 30 years beyond the age of 65,” said Nora Super, chief of programs and services at the National Association for Area Agencies on Aging, or n4a. “And with this new opportunity, people are rethinking what that means and how they want to spend their time.”

Super, who previously served as executive director of the White House Conference on Aging, said a growing number of seniors are searching for, and finding, purpose in retirement through volunteerism.

According to the Corporation for National and Community Service—a federal agency that operates AmeriCorps, Senior Corps and other national service initiatives—24 percent of the nation’s seniors, volunteered in 2014, contributing 2 billion hours of service.

“Ten thousand people a day turn 65—that’s a great pool of potential volunteers,” said Peter Lane, director of leadership and volunteer development for n4a. “This is probably the most educated and experienced generation in the history of the United States, so it’s a really great resource for society to tap.”

According to Lane, the benefits of senior volunteerism are far reaching.

In October, n4a launched a national campaign to “help make (seniors) more aware of the benefits of volunteering beyond just ‘doing good,’” said Lane, such as decreased rates of depression and improvements in overall health indicators. “It’s actually in their own interest.”

State governments also are reaping the benefits of increased senior volunteerism, and CSG is honored to salute the following senior volunteers, and many more across the country, who are making a difference in their states and communities.



JAMES R. HANSEN, VISITOR SERVICES VOLUNTEER
KARTCHNER CAVERNS STATE PARK, ARIZONA STATE PARKS
BENSON, ARIZONA

Jim Hansen, 80, spent 40 years as a lineman for the local electric company, and 38 years as a volunteer fireman for the Benson Fire Department in Benson, Arizona, when he retired in 2001. “When I retired, all I was doing was sitting at home, watching TV,” Hansen said. So when he heard that the nearby Kartchner Caverns State Park was looking for volunteers, he jumped at the opportunity.

Hansen serves as a visitor services volunteer, driving the park tram in the morning and welcoming visitors at the park gatehouse in the afternoon.

“Just a couple of months ago, I surpassed 26,000 hours of volunteer time,” he said. “I just really enjoy volunteering.”

His dedicated service has earned him a number of awards over the years, as well as an impressive collection of hat pins from all over the world gifted by park visitors, which he shows off on his signature cowboy hat. He said when one hat runs out of room, he simply buys a new one. He’s now filling his fifth cowboy hat with pins.

“I even have a bridge named after me here at Kartchner Caverns,” he said. “We call it the Jim Hansen Bridge. I drive (the tram) over it every day.”

The Jim Hansen Bridge even helped two recent visitors discover they were relatives of the tram driver. Seeing the name on the bridge during the tram ride, the ladies asked who Jim Hansen was, and he replied, “That’s me.” After a few more questions, the women—one from California and the other from Colorado—discovered they were Hansen’s relatives.

For Hansen, volunteering with the Arizona State Parks is a way to stay connected and active during his retirement. “It gives me a little exercise, keeps me moving,” he said. “I think it’s healthier for me.”



REGINA D. ALLEN, VOLUNTEER SENIOR
MICHIGAN STATE ADVISORY COUNCIL ON AGING
LANSING, MICHIGAN

Older adults tend to have a variety of appointments, and making sure there are ways for seniors to get to them is a priority for Regina Allen, 66.

"My concern has always been transportation, particularly for seniors, the homeless and disabled," said Allen. "How do they get from one appointment to the next? Where is the funding? Can we car share? Can we bus?"

Since 2009, Allen has served as a volunteer representative, appointed by the Office of the Governor, on Michigan's State Advisory Council on Aging, a body she first became involved with during her career with the Social Security Administration.

Allen also volunteers daily at local schools in Lansing, Michigan—a role she happened upon after donating school supplies to a neighborhood school with high-level needs.

"I got a chance to really see for myself up front that (the students) needed attention, they needed love," said Allen. "It was a good experience for me."

For Allen, volunteering for the State Advisory Council on Aging and in Michigan's schools is an extension of her career in public service. "I always said that I was blessed to get into the federal government for 40 years, and I thought I did some good helping troubleshoot for the Social Security Administration and for the state of Michigan," said Allen. "I'm not going to stop volunteering as long as my health permits."

And she doesn't seem to be slowing down any time soon. "Some people say I'm a mover and shaker," said Allen. "My mother called it 'nervous energy.'"



GILBERT "DOC" ASHBY, MEDICARE COUNSELOR
LOUDOUN COUNTY AREA AGENCY ON AGING
HAMILTON, VIRGINIA

When Doc Ashby, 80, retired from his job as a mid-level manager with a telecommunications company in 1996, he quickly found himself in a caregiving role for his wife. "She started forgetting things, started doing strange things, and I didn't know where to turn and which way to go," said Ashby. During a trip to the doctor, they soon learned she needed around-the-clock care.

"She started going to the adult day center and that left me alone," said Ashby. But an advertisement for volunteers for the Loudoun County Area Agency on Aging's Medicare and tax preparation programs opened a door to a second career for Ashby.

"It started with me having spare time and having nothing to do," said Ashby, "and I found it very rewarding to help others."

When he took on his volunteer role, Ashby wasn't yet eligible for and knew very little about Medicare. "I found it challenging to study and learn the information I needed to do it," he said.

These days, Ashby spends about 35 hours a week counseling other seniors on Medicare and tax preparation during the busy season—from September to April.

Ashby also counsels caregivers who are helping their aging loved ones.

"I can associate when they come to me as being where I was when my wife was sick—not knowing which direction to go, not knowing what decisions to make, not knowing what to do. To be able to point them in the right direction, that leaves me feeling good at the end of the day," said Ashby. "Often tired, but good."

And Ashby said volunteering keeps him feeling good physically, too. "Being active and keeping our bodies physically active—going places, doing things, learning new things," is important, he said, and he encourages others his age to do the same.

"Get out of the rocking chair, get busy and volunteer!" **CI**