



Sue Perlgut and Christopher Julian recently screened their documentary at the Ulysses Philomathic Library in Trumansburg.

Film Puts a Local Face on Retirement

By Sue Henninger

This week's headline is especially appropriate, as it will be the last column that I write for Tompkins Weekly. Though I have very much enjoyed writing about all that is going on in the Trumansburg/Ulysses area, other commitments require more time at the moment. Maybe when I reach retirement age, I will be able to take up journalism again.

"101 Ways to Retire-or Not!" (subtitled "Active Retirement in the 21st Century") is a documentary funded in part by a grant by the Community Arts Partnership of Tompkins County/NYS Council on the Arts Decentralization Program. The film was created by Sue Perlgut, who has an extensive background in theater and the arts, and Christopher Julian, a freelance video producer/director and editor who also pursues "countless other art forms."

Perlgut and Julian describe their goal in making the documentary as finding men and women, age 50 to 80, who live active and vital lives and who redefine what it means to be retired and senior citizens.

The documentary focuses on nine Tompkins County residents who have retired, looking at what led up to their decision to stop working and how they live their life in retirement. There are also a number of mini-interviews with people of all ages asking them about veno plans to retire or are never going to retire. but the reality is that some 78 million baby Boomers will reach retirement age between now and 2016, and many of those age 63 and older have a life expectancy of 83 or older.

The Ulysses Philomathic Library recently screened the film, followed by a discussion period. The program was sponsored by both Lifelong, an Ithaca-based program whose mission is to "enhance the lives of adults in Tompkins County who are in the second half of life," and the Community Arts Partnership Decentralization grant. In attendance were the documentary's "stars," local residents and the filmmakers.

Though many area residents who participated in the film live different lifestyles, there is one common theme among them. Money is seen as one of the greatest obstacles to spending retirement in the ways they desire. As Lenny, one of those filmed, notes, "I started working at 16 and I have never been out of work, but I'm still poor." Many of the those interviewed on the street also mention that they have no money to

retire, or that they couldn't afford to retire.

And a majority of older residents agree that their Social Security income has to be supplemented by other sources, while younger residents state that they feel pressure to start saving now. "After 62 or 65, I still have the same bills to pay and whatever you want to do, you need money," says Lenny.

Some of those interviewed note that trying to live debt-free since their younger years has allowed them to be financially secure enough to enjoy their retirement.

Another strategy is to "practice" living on their retirement income prior to actually retiring to get a sense of what it would entail. Despite financial concerns, the goal of the nine in-depth subjects in the film seems to be to have a happy, healthy and productive quality of life, which is driven by their attitudes; they do not allow finances or health to change the way they live their lives.

Ulysses residents Ben Nichols and Joan Ormondroyd both discuss some of the things that they have accomplished as retirees. Nichols notes that he has "retired several times already," first from a 40-year career as a faculty member at Cornell, then from a political career as a three-term mayor of the City of Ithaca (he was first elected at age 70). He believes that "getting absorbed keeps you more alive" and he plans to continue to participate in city and community affairs because it is important to him to "keep going, just not at the same pace."

"I refuse to think of myself as being as old as I am," Nichols adds. "The only time that I identify myself as a senior is when I can get the senior discount."

Ormondroyd observes, "I have loved retirement." She volunteers at the Ulysses Philomathic Library in a variety of capacities, teaches Tai Chi, and writes letters to the local newspapers. In doing this she joins one out of four other seniors who volunteer for not-for-profits. Ormondroyd, like many other seniors, also returned to school to learn more about computers so she would not be left behind as technology advances.

Perlgut herself came out of retirement to make this film, and has three more films in the works. "I haven't had this much fun in years!" she says.

"Twenty-year-olds are as interested [in retirement] as 60-year-olds," Julian says. "The film is universal because people of all ages will retire some day."

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