

Bloomington company retirees find benefits in group activities

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By Don Heinzman

Guest Column

Experts agree that staying in contact with friends and having a good time can lead to a better aging life.

In his book "The Blue Zones," Dan Buettner quotes Dr. Robert Kane, director of the Center on Aging and director of the Geriatric Center at the University of Minnesota, on one of the keys to successful aging, social connectedness: "Most people enjoy the company of other people, particularly people who they feel care about them."

Retiree clubs, one such outlet, have members who like to socialize, particularly with people they know.

One of the biggest clubs in this area is offered to past employees of Control Data or Ceridian, a computer company based in Bloomington. At the pinnacle of its success, it employed 69,000 staff members worldwide. During that time, 24,000 lived in the Twin Cities area. So it is understandable that the company has one of the largest retirees clubs in the Twin Cities area, with 1,700 active members, including 586 spouses and an additional 300 inactive members.

There are other retirees clubs with many members from companies such as 3M, Honeywell and General Mills. There is no doubt, however, that this club has more activities than any other in the area, producing up to 75 different educational, social and recreational events for its members in one year, according to Charles "Chuck" Woldum, the club's executive director.

At a recent annual meeting, members cited health benefits from the club, saying that depression is greatly reduced with so many places to go. Others say that getting out is important and is an alternative to staying home, doing nothing and becoming bored, lonely or depressed. Woldum wants all those who worked at least 10 years at the company to know about this benefit – just call the retirees office at 952-853-6562.

Thanks to a separate foundation that manages funds from a \$6 million sale of parkland overlooking the St. Croix River, the club can sponsor events and pays up to 40 percent of members' cost to attend events – one reason for the club's success, Woldum said.

Twelve retirees rotate on a board of directors that manages the funds and plans events. Members pay annual dues of \$10 a year for the right to attend picnics, sporting events, theater productions and more. Even spouses and significant others can get the discount by paying the \$10 annual dues.

Woldum said that the club averages 5,700 to 6,800 members and guests who participate in at least one club program a year. He is confident no other retirees club in the state has more participation. That's a far cry from 1979 when the club started with 140 members, including 33 spouses.

Woldum said at one time the club had all kinds of fitness activities: golf, softball leagues and bowling teams. Now, as members age, they attend events that "get them up and around."

Woldum figured the target year will be 2022 when funding may be depleted and the club might need to close. For now, he hopes all Control Data and Ceridian retirees who served at least 10 years with the company will sign up for the fun that members and their wives are having in this amazing retirees club.

Don Heinzman is a columnist for ECM Publishers.

