



Illinois Retiree Volunteer Program



A Statewide System for Connecting Retirees to Schools

Throughout our educational system, retirees are making a difference as tutors, mentors, and advocates for education. They read with elementary students, discuss careers, tutor at-risk-students, learn about computers, and share their many talents.

. . .But we aren't even beginning to tap the potential.

Background

Civility and Working Together

Most of us can recall people and events in our history that had an impact on our futures. Two of my life lessons came from my grandmother and Senator Mike Mansfield. Growing up in Montana, I remember sitting with my grandmother and reading the paper about far away places, like Washington, D.C. My grandmother (called Banjo) instilled in me curiosity about the world and perseverance to deal with it. She said, "Success is a matter of knowing which door to try. If you can't get in the front door, go the side; if that doesn't work try the back door; and never be afraid to crawl through a window." Her advice has served me well when I experienced skeptics who didn't understand the importance of intergenerational efforts. It was simply a matter of learning about doors.

I journeyed to Washington, D.C. for the first time in January 1964, and immediately became immersed in Washington politics as a student at Georgetown University and a volunteer for Majority Leader Mike Mansfield. The Civil Rights legislation was the focus in Washington and watching it happen was a life experience that I will never forget. As Senator Mansfield, a Democrat, and Senator Everett Dirksen, a Republican, worked together to pass the Civil Rights Act, I saw models of compromise, perseverance, and civility. They had to give a little, listen to other viewpoints, and value other opinions to build consensus. On June 10, 44 Democrats and 22 Republicans voted for cloture, and on June 19 the Senate passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 by a 73-27 vote. It wouldn't have happened without opening many doors or without a concerted effort of people working together in the spirit of civility and collegiality.

I witnessed that civility and collegiality again when I moved to Illinois and met Paul and Jeanne Hurley Simon. I worked with Jeanne when she chaired the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science. She helped us establish an intergenerational component in the American Library Association and gave us a national voice. Paul Simon gave me the honor of a lifetime when he appointed me as his delegate to the 1995 White House Conference on Aging. Later, at SIU, I enrolled in his courses and later published his "Eleven Steps Can Lead to Increase in Civility." The new partnership between presidents and retirees from higher education called the Illinois Retiree Volunteer Program demonstrates a fine example of people working together to strengthen our educational system and honors Paul and Jeanne Simon.

Together, let us dedicate this new program and all its possibilities, to the special people in our lives, those who mentored us, gave us special talents, and provided strong models for authentic patriotism.



Jane Angelis, Director
Intergenerational Initiative



"I can't think of a more valuable resource for students, teachers and schools than our nation's retirees. Retired volunteers from different professions and backgrounds provide our young people with academic help, guidance and mentoring that will stay with them all their lives."
U.S. Senator Dick Durbin

"Congratulations to the presidents and annuitants for their partnership that will link generations in activities that enrich education and the lives young and old."
*Speaker of the House
Dennis Hastert*



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The Dilemma

“America’s colleges and universities have a serious and deep-rooted problem: far too many students who enter our higher education system fail to get a degree,” according to Kevin Carey, in his 2004 Education Trust report, *A Matter of Degrees: Improving Graduation Rates in Four-Year Colleges and Universities*. Access is a high priority for the Illinois Board of Higher Education but with only 63% of students completing college (48% of low income) clearly there is a challenge.

Growing Retiree Population

The 2000 census reports that one and half million Illinoisans are age 65 or older, representing more than 12% of the population. By 2030, it is projected to increase to 20%. We can find this growing number of retirees on campuses throughout Illinois. For example, the State Universities Annuitants Association, an organization for retirees in higher education, has 12,000 members. More than 60,000 older adults take courses on community college and university campuses. And yet, in a 2003 AARP study, those 45+ were asked if they volunteered in elementary, middle, or high schools. Only 16% said yes.

But volunteering is not always something retirees do. “The percentage of people who volunteer reaches a peak in mid-life-not in retirement--and then declines,” according to a 2004 Harvard study, “Reinventing Aging: Baby Boomers and Civic Engagement.” Many retirees say they are interested in helping in the schools, but according to Don Naylor, executive director of the State Universities Annuitants Association, “a big stumbling block is the lack of an organized effort.”

Who

Retirees from universities, community colleges, and local communities are invited to give an hour a week to read with students or get involved in local schools. They are also asked to bring a friend to expand this retiree corps.

What, Where, and When

By 2007, presidents and chancellors in cooperation with annuitants and local schools, will establish retiree volunteer programs throughout Illinois. In a nutshell, higher education will take the leadership in recruiting retirees.

Why

Getting ready for college doesn’t happen in high school, it is a process that begins in preschool and the early grades as students build basic skills. Yet by the third grade, 38% of the students are not reading at grade level, and the dream of college may be lost forever. Writing skills are also lagging in the early years. The National Commission on Writing found that only 1 out of 4 students in eighth grade are proficient. Those statistics reflect the number of students who need remediation when they come to higher education--41 percent for two-year public institutions, and 22 percent at public four-year institutions (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1995) at the cost of \$1,000 a year per student (GAO, 97-142).

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A Partnership with Annuitants

"Older adults who share their time and energy bring so much to our school system. In our mobile society, not all children have access to their grandparents and great aunts or uncles. Senior citizens' participation in their neighborhood classroom provides opportunities for bonds between generations and the sharing of information and life experiences. It is enriching for the children and the adults who give of themselves."

*Senate Republican Leader
Frank Watson*



A Challenge to Annuitants:

"As active, involved members of your communities, you have the opportunity to make a difference ... a significant difference in the lives of children. I am talking about volunteering at a school to help children who need some help with math, reading, science, or spelling. I am talking about an hour or two a week that could mean the difference between a child who goes to college and a child who drops out of school. You can make that difference."

Senate President Emil Jones, Jr.

State Universities Annuitants Association (SUAA)

SUAA is a voluntary not-for-profit organization established in 1971 representing SURS (State University Retirement System) retirees and survivors. SUAA is dedicated to educational and charitable purposes, helping to advocate the state's role in the system, as well as to advocate improvements in the benefits paid to annuitants and to their survivors. Presently there are 12,000 members in 48 local chapters on community college and state university campuses. The association has grown by 66 percent in the last five years.

A local board of duly elected officers and directors governs each chapter. Chapters offer social activities, informational and educational programs, and service to the campus and community. Chapters appoint local representatives to serve on the state board of directors. The SUAA board of directors meets three times a year to conduct business, set goals and objectives and determine direction. Due to the large size of the board, a seven-person executive committee carries out association business conducted between board meetings. Current priorities include full funding of the pension system, allowing up to two years of service credit for sick leave, and maintaining a viable state group health plan.

Members of the executive committee are David Hilquist, President, Oakton Community College; Katharine Kral, Treasurer, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; Judy Curry, Member at Large, University of Illinois Chicago; Patricia Valentino, Member at Large, Oakton Community College; Burton Witthuhn, Member at Large, Western Illinois University; and Robert Harper, Past President, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. Don Naylor is the executive director.

and Presidents and Chancellors

Higher Education Embraces the Illinois Retiree Volunteer Program



"The Chicago State University community sincerely appreciates the wonderful services provided by our retiree volunteers. From galas to Christmas parties and many other activities, these stalwart individuals are the epitome of what community service is all about. When they go into the schools they take their love of education and share it with students."

President Elnora D. Daniel, Chicago State University



The organizational committee for the Illinois Retiree Volunteer Program at SIU Carbondale includes (L to R) Dave Christensen, Southern Illinois Learning in Retirement; Chancellor Walter V. Wendler, Robert Radtke, Southern Illinois Learning in Retirement; and Emil Spees and Bruce Appleby, Emeritus and Annuitants Association. The annuitants recruited 12 new volunteers who have completed their orientation and will begin tutoring young students.

Presidents and chancellors of community colleges and universities have given the Illinois Retiree Volunteer Program a positive nod. Without exception, they endorsed the idea and have visions of the benefits to schools, to their campuses, and to future generations of students. The progress on each campus will be highlighted in the Spring 2005 issue of *Continuance* magazine.

Three campuses, SIU Carbondale, John Wood Community College, and Chicago State University, have started with a brainstorming session about how to organize a Retiree Volunteer Program. The main task is to develop a recruitment strategy in sync with the volunteer programs in local schools. In other words, the Illinois Retiree Volunteer Program will strengthen the connections between higher education and the schools through retirees.

"This year Western Illinois University's theme is Civic Engagement. Annuitants will have an opportunity to participate in volunteer activities as well as become more involved in schools and the community."

*Al Goldfarb, President
Western Illinois University*

"We all have a stake in bringing students to college with stronger basic skills, and few people understand that better than retired university faculty."

John G. Peters, President Northern IL University

Possibilities and Potential



"I have always believed that our Seniors have a tremendous amount of experience to share. I applaud those behind the Illinois Retiree Volunteer Program and I believe we will begin to see the benefits of this program upon our students immediately."
*Illinois House Republican Leader
Tom Cross*



"Retirees will reach back into their knowledge and wisdom to help young students move forward and do their best. Both will be the richer for the Illinois Retiree Volunteer Program experience."
*Illinois State Representative
Mary Flowers*

Retirees can do a lot for young students. They bring the wisdom and knowledge built over the years—talents that should not go to waste. I strongly support the involvement of retirees in the schools.
*Illinois State Representative
Calvin L. Giles*



"Intergenerational interaction is a wonderful initiative which gives both the retiree who volunteers and young student needing a little extra help an opportunity to interact with a different generation, as well as to learn from each other. It can enrich the lives of both and it incorporates a third voice into the thought process that can give the students a different perspective."
*Illinois State Representative
Renee Kosel*



The Possibilities and Potential for All Levels of Education

The possibilities for the Illinois Retiree volunteer Program are endless. Retirees are sleeping giants ready to exert wisdom and energy at all levels of education. Picture grandparent figures with preschoolers and kindergartners, quelling their misgivings on the first day of school. Picture first through fourth graders honing their basic skills by having a retiree pen pal. Think about middle school students having strong anchors when they are adjusting to the teen years. Consider how retirees could reenergize the high school experience, helping students to conduct research on family and community history. And last, think about how retirees could enrich college life by sharing their experiences and discussing career possibilities for the future.



"When older persons share their time and knowledge with young students and their schools, the entire community is enriched. Seniors have the experience, the desire, and the time to give back to their communities, and there is no better way to contribute than to strengthen our schools and give young people extra time and attention. The Illinois Retiree Volunteer Program is truly a win-win relationship for everyone."
*Randy Dunn, Interim Superintendent,
Illinois state Board of Education*

Making It Happen

Challenges for Illinoisans For Presidents, Annuitants, the General Assembly, and Board Members at all Levels of Education

The Illinois Retiree Volunteer Program will work if everyone accepts their challenge and takes action.

Presidents and Annuitants are the key. They must get it started and renew momentum periodically.

Annuitants must make a commitment to give an hour a week and invite friends and colleagues to join the effort.

Superintendents, Principals, and Teachers must champion volunteer programs.

Members of the General Assembly must use the bully pulpit to keep the program front and center

Board Members throughout our educational system must consistently bring volunteer programs to the agenda and ask about progress.



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Attorney General Lisa Madigan



"Retired people have a vast reservoir of knowledge and wisdom that we must take advantage of in our educational system."

**Illinois State Senator
David Luechtefeld**

**To the retiree volunteer
"Your talent and time are most useful when you choose to volunteer your services. Some people seek happiness in things but true happiness is in doing for others. He good tidings last!
Illinois State Representative
Monique D. Davis**



"State University Annuitants have a wonderful grasp of research, theory and contacts that could enrich any school district. Their commitment to learning, training, and concern for students make them motivated, compassionate and excellent role models who are rich with relevant life experiences."

**Illinois State Representative
Robert W. Pritchard**

"The retirees who volunteer do tremendous things for both those who are helped, i.e. school children, as well as themselves, by staying active and alert. The benefits and rewards are never ending."

**Illinois State Representative
Jerry Mitchell**



Eleven Steps Can Lead to Increase in Civility

Senator Paul Simon

I sometimes read about “the declining civility” in our public life, and it is true that we have grown excessively partisan and sometimes simply rude in our public discourse. Democrats and Republicans work together less than they did two decades ago, and that is not good for the nation and not good for either political party. To blame Congress alone is a mistake. All of us play a role in making ours a more or less civil society. On the right are 11 disconnected points, a personal program you can follow that will help. These simple 11 points are things each of us can do to make ours a more civil society.

From the Chicago Sun Times, April 20, 2000 and Continuation Magazine, Summer 2000

- In a debate or dispute, whether in the U.S. Senate or in your office or your family, assume that the other person is as sincere as you are. Almost always that is a valid assumption, and it takes the harshness away from a dispute.
- Volunteer to help a civic association.
- When waitresses or waiters bring you food in a restaurant, or salespeople help you buy something, thank them.
- Be as courteous to your family as you would be to others, and as courteous to others as you would be to your family.
- Be a courteous driver, letting people into your lane, pausing to let pedestrians across the street and doing the small things that will cost you less than two minutes a day—and reduce your chance of getting ulcers.
- At least once a week, send a note of congratulations or thanks or sympathy to someone.
- Don’t tell jokes that show disrespect to another race, religion, ethnic group or association of people of any kind.
- Use restraint in language. This is related to the previous point, but broader. If you use restraint in language, others probably will do the same. Sometimes incivility of language comes from people who do not intend to stir up animosity, but intemperate language often causes intemperate responses.
- Pick up a scrap of paper or an empty can that is littering the area where you are walking. It’s good exercise for you, a good example for others and somehow doing it or observing it makes everyone feel better.
- Don’t watch too much television. A Harvard study came to the conclusion that the reason we attend church less and belong in fewer numbers to groups, from the Rotary Club to a bowling league, is that we watch too much television.
- At least once every six months, invite someone from a “different” group for dinner at your home (preferably) or to a restaurant.