

March 26, 2018

## **Advice for young teachers from those who've been there**

We took to Facebook recently to ask our senior TRA members what advice they have for working teachers about retirement planning.

Their thoughtful answers reflect much of what TRA's retirement professionals hear from teachers every day: how to ensure that there's enough to live on in retirement, thoughts about how to fill their time after retirement, and ambivalence about leaving the classroom.

Robert Strandquist offered a detailed step-by-step thought process for teachers nearing retirement. "First, savor these last days, weeks and months. Talk to your students about your journey and how they are part of it. They're learning more from you now than ever before: how an adult 'graduates,'" he said.

"Second, go to a TRA office and learn your options – this brings clarity to your financial profile," he continued. "Third, talk to your family about retirement and what it might mean for each of them." Strandquist advised the soon-to- retire teacher to embrace the uncertainty of freedom from the structure of school life. And be prepared to answer the most frequently-asked question: What are you going to do?

"My suggested reply is, 'About what?'" he said.

Allen Beaton says there is no right way to retire well. "Just make sure you have put away enough. I was very happy teaching, but I also wanted to do other things. I love to travel and now I have the freedom to do it when I want," Beaton said.

Bill Haring recommended visiting with a TRA retirement counselor early. "They are very helpful in planning an early exit strategy," he said.

"Be sure you understand every part of it – TRA, [Social Security], Medicare, etc.," Sue Westegaard cautioned. "It is very easy to make a mistake."

Several retirees said that they had used the services of fee-based financial planners. Karen Berger made a detailed plan – income, expenses, distributions – with a financial planner and was pleasantly surprised to learn that she needn't worry. Deb Neher advises younger teachers to

maximize savings to their deferred compensation account to supplement their eventual TRA pension and Social Security income.

Some retirees' advice was quite specific about what it means to get your financial house in order, drilling down on some essential nuts-and-bolts bits of wisdom.

“Two to five years before you retire, fix all the things around the house, make sure your vehicles are in good shape, and pay off all credit cards,” said Scott Coffman.

“Take care of any pending medical issues,” added Judy Evenson. “Medicare is not a gold standard by any stretch of the imagination.”

Though many Facebook respondents are joyful and positive about retirement – “There is much outside of the classroom to enjoy!” “Go for it!” “Find your next passion!” – others caution against leaving the classroom too soon.

Sue Rolfson said she misses the feeling of life purpose as well as the income. Tom Dalen and Ruth Koehler agreed.

“Don't jump too soon. If you love your job, you will never have to go to work,” Dalen said.

“If you still love teaching, stay in it as long as you can,” Koehler added.

Jeff Krause recommended that teachers consider teaching overseas after retirement, and Larry Klueh suggested substitute work. Doing so would “help offer continuity to wonderful young teachers,” Klueh said.

“Remember that it meant a load of extra work to take a day off – but if a teacher can give the class to a competent sub, the load is less! And the kids are great!” Klueh said.

Great advice from teachers who've been schooled about retirement issues. And then there are the TRA Facebook followers who, perhaps with a bit of wistful 20/20 hindsight, couldn't resist responding with tongue planted in cheek. There's this, from Tim Sheie:

“Start saving aggressively 20 years ago.” ■

**Want to help the next generation(s) of teachers plan for their retirement? Got some stories and words of wisdom to share? Keep the conversation going at MinnesotaTRA on Facebook!**