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## Reinventing Yourself in Retirement

By *Sophie Braccini*

Roberta Dillon (pink sweater) with her class Photo courtesy R. Dillon

Roberta Dillon does not believe anyone should drift lazily and aimlessly toward retirement; to take full advantage of this potentially rewarding time of life one must make a plan - she firmly believes that some serious soul searching is in order. That conviction sent her on an exploration of her own when she found herself prematurely retired from corporate America. Her quest led her to create a class, first taught at the College of Marin, which is coming to Saint Mary's College as part of the Lifelong Learning program. It is called "Celebrate Retirement - The freedom and the frustration," and is scheduled to begin on February 22, meeting for seven Tuesday evenings.

"When my job was eliminated, I fought it for a while," said Peter Boam, who took Dillon's class, "the class was a way to accept retirement, confirm what I wanted to do, and make a plan to get there." Boam added that the phrase "freedom and frustration" embodies what he felt when his position, as Director for Communication and Compliance with Harley Davidson in Los Angeles, was eliminated

"How Peter (Boam) felt, the 'what now?' is what many people experience, once the newness of the situation wears off," says Dillon, "men who were powerful suffer the most.

They've lost a large part of their identity and their 'work-family.' They have to reinvent themselves and discover how to manifest their dreams."

Dillon learned these lessons the hard way, through imposed experience. She didn't think that she was anywhere close to retirement when she was unexpectedly retired from her vice president position in the financial industry a few years ago. "I knew I would get another job," she said, "but then, I didn't!" She remembers that the frustration and fear sent her into a tailspin. She traveled all over the country in an effort to retool herself and ended on a journey of self-discovery. In Atlanta, she took a class called "Celebrate Retirement" and gained so much from the experience that, after discussing the possibilities with the instructors, she decided to teach her own version at the College of Marin.

Dillon finds that each participant comes to the class at a different stage in life and from a variety of circumstances. Some have yet to retire and want to more effectively plan for it, while others have been retired for years and want to expand their horizons; still others have been thrust into this stage of life. Some people are so bitter about what has happened to them that they can't share anything at the beginning of the class, they just listen and take notes. "Sharing is optional," she says, "but by the end of the class most everyone opens up and contributes to the group."

"I was totally unfocused when I got my severance package and I was not the only one," says Boam, "one person in the class decided that she wanted to live in Thailand, another was a financial adviser who wanted to do more with food preparation." Boam added that both the group setting and the methodology used by Dillon were huge time-savers in getting the next phase of his life on track.

"I see myself as a facilitator," says Dillon, "we work with a manual that includes exercises, but each group has a different personality and each class has a life of its own. I am just there to steer the boat."

According to Dillon, "Celebrate Retirement" is a class that offers the tools to take the fear out of retiring and starting a new life. Boam, who was a radio broadcaster earlier in his career, is now a high school sports announcer for both football and basketball. He also launched his own web site and does voice-over gigs. "We had a lot of fun," said Boam, "I would recommend it for anyone in transition, at whatever stage of their lives."

Registration for the class ends on February 11. Contact Grete Stenersen, Lifelong Learning Director, by calling 631-4162 or emailing [gsteners@stmarys-ca.edu](mailto:gsteners@stmarys-ca.edu).

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[back](#)

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