

Retirement is busy time for Hobbyists - NorthJersey.com

By betsy murphy



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Bob Norelli, left, current president, and John Butler are long-time Hobbyists.

York. Every Tuesday, from 8 to 20 men meet, bag lunch in hand, to spend a day enjoying nature. Their hikes can be three miles, five miles, eight miles. Often there will be an alternative trail, so a hiker can choose the short (3-mile) or longer (6-mile) route.

One of the newest members, "3, 4 years," Bob Yampell, is chair of ROMEO (Retired Old Men Eating Out). "Purpose is to get together for a moderate-priced lunch, BYO," he explains. "We try a different restaurant each time. It's good camaraderie; we get to know new members." He also hikes, walks, plays bridge; takes part in music appreciation and in book, and investment groups. "My wife loves it!" he says with a grin. "It gets me out of the house."



Hobbyists Unlimited, started by Harold Wilt in 1966 as a Retired Men's Club boasting 15 members, was an idea that caught on and kept on growing. Today, the non-profit, non-political, non-sectarian organization, numbers more than 400 busy, involved members. Meeting once a month at The First Presbyterian Church, their sponsor, with six officers; an executive board and a senior advisory board, retired and semi-retired men can choose to take part in as many as 30 activities, from bocce to wine appreciation.

Quentin Wiest, 98, has been a member since 1976. "It's a nice thing to have when you retire," he says. "You come home and don't go to work. With the Hobbyists there's an activity nearly every day of the week." He adds, "When you first retire, you're still pretty young, can engage in physical activities; when you're older you can move into more educational things, book groups, for example. You can go from skiing to public affairs. Activities are not limited, that's one of the prime advantages." He points out, "Years ago, we had no music group, no wine tasting, no movie group. Now, it's a lot larger and with more members you get more interests, more activities. He used to go to all the dances when his wife was alive. Today, he attends most meetings, bowls, golfs and plays bridge.

Ed Collins is an outdoorsman, one of the Hobbyists hikers who lead the group on trails through New Jersey and New

York. "It almost fills up more time than I've got," says Bob Norelli, who has just taken over as president. He has been chair of the bowling committee and the golf committee and belongs to the Camera Club. "My wife and I have been on a few trips, and we go to all the dances," he says. "I stay pretty involved with whatever's going on."

A great organization seems to be the mantra of many a



member. Norelli uses it to describe his feeling, adding, "Everyone is so close. There's such fellowship, the guys are helpful, always helping each other."

Helpful in time of need, as Jim Feeney knows. He's been in charge of Hobbyists Concerned for several years, sending e-mails when a Hobbyist, or one of his family members, becomes ill, is hospitalized or has died. Cards start arriving; phone calls and visits are made.

Bob Paoli has been a Hobbyist for more than 15 years. "When I retired," he admits, "I had no skills, no hobbies. My wife was worried that I'd become a couch potato." A friend introduced him to The Hobbyists. "I had never heard of them," he offers. "The nicest part is it doesn't matter who you are or where you came from." Paoli, who was with the Sanitation Department in New York City, says, "I sat at meetings with professionals, doctors, lawyers, accountants. I took to it right away. It was right up my alley. Hobbyists afforded me the opportunity to get involved in different things. I was interested in travel and got involved with Trips and Tours right away, as chair, planning weekend trips and cruises. But New York City trips are his favorite. "I grew up in New York, worked in Manhattan for more than 15 years and know my way around the city." Indeed he does: Chelsea, TriBeCa or Chinatown; the financial district, theater district, the site of the old Fulton Fish Market; the Cloisters, Central Park, the South Street Seaport. Paoli is one of several members who share knowledge or skills to enhance the lives of fellow Hobbyists. "It's a great organization," he says. "There's something for everyone."

Including the Camera Club which, chaired by Giancarlo Bisone, has grown its membership from 25 to 70. "I joined in 2001," says Bisone, "and for many years was the only 'baby boomer' of the organization as I was lucky enough to be able to retire at the age of 53. From that date, my days have been filled with activities: tennis, hiking, bowling, trips and tours, camera club, and more. Fellow members made me forget about my professional career. My favorite answer to people asking if I miss my corporate life is always, "I am too busy with the Hobbyists so I don't have time to work."

Bill Carbone, a 10-year member, was president before Paoli; "A wonderful means for guys to get together and enjoy activities together as well as use it as a base to see and share things with wives," is his description.

Those 'things with wives' include the trips, tours and dances the Hobbyists enjoy throughout the year, including weekend trips, even European tours and river cruises.

With members' enthusiasm for dancing, Don Barley started a dance club for those who want to learn new steps like the Meringue or Samba a year or so ago. He also has been chair of the tennis group, still plays "in between injuries," goes on smaller trips and belongs to the movie group. "Warren Borosen is in charge and the quality of the movies is just great," he comments. "And they serve popcorn."

Warren Borosen, as financial columnist for The Record, addressed the Investment Group in 1990 and found them so interesting he asked about joining the Hobbyists. It wasn't until 2000, when membership opened to other towns that he became a member. He finds it "a good way for older men to meet and make new friends," theorizing, "men have few male friends because we tend to have competed with each other. These are good friends and admirable people." He brought ROMEO to the group, is chair of the Investment Group and of Movies. Says he, "It keeps me out of trouble."

With Borosen and Collins, Bob Stevenson started the wine appreciation group about four years ago, "discovering upscale wines, upscale restaurants." He's also in investment, public affairs, computer, book, as well as taking part in ROMEO and Trips and Tours. The Computer Club provided the opportunity to conduct

two surveys, which led to changes (e.g. venue for dances). With three dances a year, attended by 200 people, there are now four dances, with 300 at the Holiday Dance. Says Stevenson, "It's an experience to meet up with such a varied group of talented retirees. Very energizing!"

Saying, "I have to run to tennis," John Butler returns a phone call to report he retired in 2000 and "became active in the Hobbyists as soon as I could." He is one of five captains of their tennis team (they rotate each week), plays poker ("we have two different groups now – one is Texas hold 'em"), took over the genealogy group from Bob Munschauer until it lost momentum, then created a book group in its place and is chair of that. "I've made many, many new friends," says Butler, who has been an officer for the last three years. "I'm impressed by Hobbyists Concerned." he states, "Its function is to alert members to anyone who is ill, hospitalized or who has died, in an e-mail that goes out to 360 people." It is a tradition for the president to attend every funeral.

A president is elected every year, with two traditions adhered to: each November, the president addresses the congregation of The First Presbyterian Church, sponsor of the Hobbyists, detailing the year's activities; the other is the annual ceremony, Passing the Gavel, which includes every past president. The presidents line up in sequence and the gavel is then passed from one to the next, reaching the hand of the new president, who at that moment becomes official and takes over the remainder of the meeting.

The Computer Club was instrumental in setting up a website for the Hobbyists. One line reads: "Diversity of careers, talent, interests, and ethnic background is what makes the organization so vibrant." Any Hobbyist would agree.