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Retirement coaching encourages great second life acts

By Brian Goslow

BOSTON —

After producing the Boston Pop's Fourth of July Fireworks Spectacular for five years, Lin Schreiber was looking to add a spark to her retirement.

So when she finished her career in retail, sales and marketing in the public relations, television and events production fields, Schreiber hired a retirement coach, who convinced her to follow through on a longtime dream of owning a home in the Berkshires.

The term retirement coach seems an oxymoron since those in the profession really help

people achieve a plan for a new stage of life, which can include work. The process involves a lot of self-examination. Retirement coaching got its start in the late 1990s. "With the demands of day-to-day life and challenging economics as baby boomers enter retirement with a desire for quality throughout life, we're increasingly seeing retirement come up as a coaching relations topic and also as a special area of focus in the profession," said Diane Brennan, president of the International Coaching Federation (ICF).

Following a few months off, Schreiber felt she'd be ready to jump into her next life adventure. Instead, she crashed and burned. Then crashed and burned again.

"I had given myself till the day after Labor Day to recharge and throw myself into the next thing," said Schreiber, 59. At her coach's encouragement, she had begun to pursue some of her earlier life interests. "I had always wanted to make a documentary, so I took an online course. That lasted six weeks until I hit a brick wall."

She began enjoying the nature and beauty of her new surroundings by partaking in long walks around her local lake and doing a lot of meditation and journal writing. "Each time I hit the brick wall, my husband said I wasn't taking advantage of the time I had," Schreiber said. "He told me I had a blank slate to create what I wanted."

With dreams of becoming an actress, Schreiber next took an acting class with a teacher from Shakespeare & Company. But instead of pursuing a career in theater, she woke up one morning to realize she had already been acting in a number of roles throughout her entire professional life. What she wanted to do next, she discovered, was take others on a life re-evaluation journey similar to her own. She asked her life coach if she had the right stuff to become coach.

"After a long period of silence, he said, 'Oh, my God, this is perfect. You've been coaching all your life,'" Schreiber said. "Now you'll get paid for it."

Schreiber started her own company, now known as Revolutionize! Retirement, in May 2001. "Now, being in front of people I get the



LeSage started a relocation concierge company.

essence of acting — I like being in front of people and inspiring people," she said.

In her new profession, Schreiber fills a number of roles — coach, speaker and host of intense weekend-long boot camps for boomers exploring next stage life planning — helping clients access their own inner wisdom and skills.

Jean Shula, 71, of Concord, N.H., became one of Schreiber's first clients after the two met at a National Speakers Association meeting. At the time, Shula was working on her master's thesis in International Peace and Conflict Studies for an Austrian college. "I had been a psychotherapist for many years and was always self-motivated, but I had a hard time making myself finish the thesis," she said. "I felt Lin could light a fire under me and hold me accountable."

Not only did Schreiber help Shula get over her writer's block and finish her thesis, she

U.S. senior centers plan for boom of 'boomers'

ENFIELD, Conn. —

Susan Lather envisions a day when paninis and mock cocktails will take their place next to fruit cups and club sandwiches on the lunch menu at the Enfield Senior Center.

Changing food preferences are among many adjustments that senior center directors nationwide, including Lather, expect to make in the next decade as they balance the wishes of their elderly stalwarts with those of baby boomer newcomers.

Some even have taken "senior" out of their names, christening the facilities "community centers." It's a nod to boomers who acknowledge they are aging but bristle at the term "senior" and the stereotypes of fragility or dependency.

The first of the 78 million boomers



Morgan

started receiving Social Security retirement benefits this year, and the Census Bureau estimates almost 8,000 of them are turning 60 every day.

"The boomers are going to have the same impact in senior centers that they had as babies when they were born, in schools, in the work force and in society in general," said Jay Morgan, manager of the Office on Aging in St. Petersburg, Fla.

"You really can't underestimate that impact," he said.

Morgan moderates a National Council on Aging online discussion group for senior center directors and said they voice common concerns about serving boomers.

Some examples: offering programs to fit the schedules of boomers working well

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► Coaching

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got her thinking about the next stage of her life. "Retirement wasn't in my vocabulary," Shula said. "I was divorced in mid-life, so the traditional expectations of retirement had all stopped. I was looking at a life change and needed transitional life coaching. Lin began to show me there were creative and dynamic ways to do things and that I was not alone in wanting to give back to the world."

Since meeting Schreiber, Shula's life has taken two distinct career paths.

One is as an author. But, because she was an unknown writer, Shula couldn't get her first book published.

Thanks to Schreiber's encouragement, Shula started work on a second book. "She had me focus on what I wanted to get out there (without harping on the shelving of the first book)," said Shula. The publication of *The Coming of Aging: Learning to Live from the Inside Out*, in 2006, led to a year-long series of speaking engagements around the country.

Those on-the-road days ended around the time Shula hit a life milestone. "Turning 70 last August was the first time in my life I was brought up short reaching a major birthday," she said.

Where she used to brush off another decade of life, this time around, Shula felt she couldn't ignore the pull of the sands Shula of time. "It's like I just can't sit around anymore," she said.

And she didn't. She reworked the first book and is currently marketing *Directions Unlimited: The Journey to Wholeness* to potential publishers. "In it, I'm really trying to get people to feel their life can become more wholesome through understanding who we are through everything we've done in our past," said Shula. "We wouldn't be who we are without both the ugly experiences and the good ones."

She's also building her own retirement coaching company, *Directions Unlimited*, using her past experience as a psychotherapist as a base. "I knew nothing about the technical world and jargon of coaching," Shula said. "Lin showed me how to transition my skills and use them in a new way."

Jane Falter, 62, had utilized career coaching when she needed guidance dealing with a tough office manager. The experience sparked a desire to eventually become a coach herself. When she was let go from her position as vice president of human relations at a Pennsylvania-based pharmaceutical company, she didn't panic.

She earned her ICF certification on weekends while working at a senior center. The center's director suggested she attend a life conference in Newark, Del., where Schreiber was the keynote speaker. That speech convinced Falter of her next career path. She pulled Schreiber aside and they talked for two hours about what it would take for Falter to

become a retirement coach.

After a year and a half of monthly phone consultations with Schreiber, Falter has started her own company, *Relocating Single*, in Asheville, N.C. "I had wanted to move to where it was warmer and the summers were longer," said Falter, who had friends in North Carolina.

She visited the Center for Creative Retirement at the University of North Carolina at Asheville and knew where she wanted to live. "The scary part, once I had decided that was, I hadn't sold my other house," Falter said. "I called Lin and said, 'I'm scared.' She said to me, 'Could you see not doing it?' A month later, my house sold."

Falter no longer thinks about retirement.

"The key for me was finding something I love," she said. "There should be another word for when you're pursuing your passion. It's a different feeling. It's more like play."

Her clients, like Schreiber's, come from all over the country.

"At first, people are concerned (about the distance)," Falter said. "It's actually good on the phone. You're able to focus on what's being said without having to worry about making the person feel comfortable in an office setting."

Falter believes that anyone who is considering a new life path and has for a long time thought, "I should have gone for that," should pursue that interest as part of the planning process. "If it's stayed with you all this time, that's a pretty strong signal that you should go with that," she said.

After 17 years as an administrator for a moving company, Claire LeSage, 61, of Norton, didn't know what she was going to do after she retired at year's end. "What I knew I didn't want to do was sit on my couch or go shopping," she said. "I wasn't into retirement as it's traditionally been known."

While a business and life coach helped her explore the financial side of starting her own business, LeSage wasn't sure how to get the emotional fulfillment she sought. "I'm trying to develop a business and a new lifestyle for when I leave my current position," she said.

She'll be utilizing knowledge gathered from taking years of business and accounting courses at Northeastern University, Middlesex Community College and Bentley College en route to earning an associate's degree in business. Her time at the moving firm has shown her what to expect when she's the one in charge. "It's not a large company and like most small companies, you get to do a little bit of everything," LeSage explained. Those are the kinds of "hidden" skills coaches like Schreiber, who LeSage found through the Internet, can point out to people evaluating what they're bringing to the next stage of their lives.

LeSage consults with Schreiber a couple

of times a month. "Initially, she had me do a lot of soul and mind searching and a lot of exercises," LeSage said. Those exercises included a wide search of potential jobs or businesses she'd potentially be interested in starting. "I looked at what I put up with on a day-to-day basis in my current position and it brought to light some issues that had to be resolved personally and professionally," she said.

Schreiber also encouraged her to put together a list of all the things she's wanted to do in her life. LeSage has already checked off a number of them, including taking a motor-

cycle lesson, going on a windjammer cruise and whitewater rafting — and starting her own business, Wittz End.

The relocation concierge company is geared to baby boomers, seniors and anyone else needing downsizing and moving help. "Being in the moving industry, I've learned many times the family is too busy to oversee their possessions being moved," LeSage said. "I'll make sure it's organized and done right, whether it's moving their utilities or moving their furniture. It's what I've been doing my whole life," said LeSage, coming to that conclusion



Schreiber



Falter

► Boomers

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into their 60s and making them diverse and intellectually appealing, and ensuring that longtime older visitors aren't alienated by the changes.

None expect it to be easy. Even those who've planned in advance say baby boomers will be unlike any generation that has ever passed through senior centers.

In Enfield, traditional activities — bingo and cribbage, blood pressure clinics, bereavement support — are now joined by high-energy Zumba exercise classes, Nintendo Wii video game tournaments and investment clubs.

Lather said she may even launch a motorcycle club for the many "young" seniors arriving at the northern Connecticut center on two wheels.

"I'd say we're a pretty hip senior center," she said. "We like it when people say 'I feel young here.'"

Center directors say some adjustments have been easy, such as showing contemporary movies in place of black-and-white and mid-20th century classics.

Other changes take more planning, such as coordinating exotic vacation trips or scheduling appointments with Social Security representatives to help "young" seniors make the transition from working life to retirement.

More than two-thirds of directors polled in a 2005 survey by the National Institute for Senior Centers said they

after Schreiber pointed out that she's been a natural caregiver for family and friends.

LeSage has been making business presentations to senior-oriented organizations and meeting and networking with potential clients about her company's philosophy and the value of her years of experience. She'll be handling the jobs with her sister, Joan Roche, 68, a retired teacher.

But more than Wittz End is on LeSage's plate for next year: She also hopes to take scuba diving lessons so she can be certified in time to go snorkeling in Hawaii, where her nephew is stationed until 2010. She also wants to travel cross-country, preferably in a RV camper — gas prices willing — and attend a game at every major league baseball stadium.

"I call this my persistence to commitment," LeSage said. "If I can do this, I can do anything. Starting a business and going into a new era of my life is worrisome — and exciting, too. There's more out there than I ever allowed my life to pursue and this is my opportunity. It's a start."

For more information: *Revolutionize! Retirement*, www.revolutionizeretirement.com or 413-499-9761; *Directions Unlimited*, <http://jeanshul.ipower.com> or 603-740-0036

thought boomers and those just a few years older could not relate to being called "seniors."

Muriel Roy, 64, counts herself among them. Roy, an Enfield center regular for about seven years, said she first thought the centers "were just for old people — and that's not me."

"They were more like a convalescent home, that was the image I had," said Roy, who was drawn to Enfield's center by her interest in one of its crafts programs.

Fellow crafts enthusiasts Cathy Gernand, 64, and Pat Beblo, 67, said they, too, thought senior centers offered nothing that would appeal to them until they were well into their 70s or 80s.

"The older you get, the further away 'old age' really gets," Beblo said, laughing.

In West Virginia, where 15 percent of the state population is 65 and older, some centers are offering seminars to younger seniors on caring for their aging parents, with whom many of the boomers will be sharing the centers.

In West Virginia's Monongalia County, the Senior Monongalians center is expanding its gym, offers an Internet cafe and expanded its hours to attract younger seniors after work.

"Each generation has its unique characteristics," Morgan said. "We have to recognize the value of the G.I. generation and silent generation and not just kick them out the door. But at the same time, we have to recognize the impact of the baby boomer generation and make changes to accommodate them." — AP

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