

# Charlotte WEEKLY

ABOUT THE COMMUNITY, FOR THE COMMUNITY

Part III:  
Local mother  
liberated  
from meth  
addiction



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## Tired of retirement

Older workers hitting  
the books and the bricks

by Ansley Meredith

For more than two decades, Monday mornings for Suzy Winters meant the start of another work week. As a paralegal and later as an administrator for an employee benefits company, Winters' days were full from before dawn until she put her two daughters to bed.

But her life changed in October when Winters, 57, left her benefits administration job to take the next step in her life. "It was not that I didn't enjoy my work," Winters explained. "I just knew it was time for a change."

At first, Winters enjoyed the time off. But after a couple months, Winters said, she was ready "to explore other opportunities, find something that gave me more meaning."

### North Carolina reaps 'returns'

Winters has joined the growing number of retirees redefining retirement. According to data from a national money management firm, about 7 million workers on the job today have returned to the workforce after retiring.

Other statistics rank North Carolina nationally as the third most popular retirement destination, meaning more retirees are moving here in search of new direction.

Many find rewarding ways to give of their time through volunteer opportunities (see guest column, page 6), a trend of great benefit to nonprofits. But growing numbers of boomers find enticing the prospect of an encore career, whether in a familiar industry or an avenue entirely new to them.

With this growing demographic in mind, Central Piedmont Community College is launching the Lifetime Learning Institute in April, offering seminars and courses specifically for baby boomers.

"It's not about what you know and what you don't know," said Lyndall Hare, director of the institute. "It's about experiencing and exploring."

### Growing your toolbox

Hare says the institute will target people between the ages of 45 and 60 who are no longer working and want or need to go back to work. On average, people return to work after about 18 months, and more than two-thirds of those, like Winters, say choice, not necessity, drives them back to work.

Hare says courses at the institute will help retirees take their existing skill set and "reinvent" themselves. "It's looking at all of your experiences and what's in your toolbox," she said, "and seeing what you can do with it."

Hare points to courses and seminars including "Re-Inventing Work Options at Midlife" and "Boomerpreneurs to

Elderpreneurs" as opportunities for people to explore new career options using their existing background. Courses such as "Boomerang to College" will offer guidance to those pursuing another degree to enter a new field.

Hare shied away from calling anything in the program a "class," noting the apprehension some people have toward returning to school after decades away from the classroom. "This is continuing education," Hare said. "It's about the individual making a shift, not about evaluation."

### Reaching employees, employers

The institute will target more than individuals, however. It also will reach out to employers hoping to retain the knowledge of their longtime employees, even after those employees retire. One of the first conferences planned by the institute, "Can Business Boom as Boomers Retire?" will involve area business leaders and include discussions of how to keep employees and their knowledge useful in the workplace after their retirement date.

A shift in thinking for individuals and businesses can be difficult, Hare said, but with 20 percent of Mecklenburg County's population expected to be over the age of 60 by 2030, that shift is necessary to keep the economy strong.

"You have to reinvent yourself, but if there's a will you can do it," Hare said. "There is life after being laid off. There is life after retirement."

Winters is certain there is life after retirement, and she is eager to take seminars and explore her options. She hopes the classes "help me kind of define the path, maybe hone in more clearly on what I have to offer as well as what's available out there," she said, noting that she is interested in the nonprofit sector. "I feel like it's a time I want to give back." □

### Want to know more?

Courses and weekend workshops begin in February and most cost around \$100. Visit [www.lifetimelearning.cpcc.edu](http://www.lifetimelearning.cpcc.edu) to learn more, or call Lyndall Hare at 704-330-6624.

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## Living the dream



Winding through the streets of Uptown, festivities celebrating Martin Luther King Jr.'s legacy of peace and equality began last Saturday with the annual holiday parade. Memorials continued throughout the holiday weekend including a community worship service and the annual Pilgrim March from East Third Street to the Charlotte Convention Center, where hundreds attended a celebration marked by gospel performances and inspirational readings. As part of this year's festivities, Lenny Springs, Wachovia's director of supplier diversity, was awarded the King Medallion Award, presented annually to individuals in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg community who exemplify King's ideals. To see how some local schools marked the national holiday, see page 25.