

This article is one of four reflections on retirement written by former AALL member Jean Holcomb, the retired director of King County Law Library, Seattle, WA. Her articles were originally posted on the blog of the Virginia Association of Law Libraries (VAL). She has given the Encore Caucus permission to post them on our webpage.

## Leaving Gracefully

By Jean Holcomb

To start, I will talk about aspects of preparing for retirement. The second installment will focus on time management for the retiree. In “up for adventure,” the third installment will point to opportunities for exploring new avenues of interest. In the concluding segment, I will share some of the personal lessons learned during the years since I left the King County Law Library.

Regardless of when the moment for retirement arrives, we all harbor dreams of a life free from the stresses of a formal work environment. For example, a palm tree, hammock, book, and an adult beverage topped with an umbrella featured prominently in my dreams during dreary Seattle winters. No matter the nature of your post-employment dreams, the time will come to turn your personal vision of retirement into reality.

How will you know what the right time is for you to retire? When should you take the first preparatory steps? Where can you turn for advice and direction? What steps can you take now? How will the process transpire?

No one wants to find themselves reliving a version of the old vaudeville routine where a character is pulled struggling off stage by a manager wielding a long crooked cane. To avoid such a scenario, we can begin the planning process with a self-evaluation. Such an evaluation might include considerations of a wide range of topics from financial planning, family needs, health, enthusiasm for the job, eligibility for post-employment benefits, and realization of career goals. Complete your assessment at set points throughout your career using such triggers as milestone birthdays or service anniversaries.

It's never too early to start planning for retirement. Particular attention should be given early to developing a sound, diversified financial forecast that takes in to account your family situation and future needs. To think and act now in a way to maximize your financial potential requires discipline. The experiences of many baby boomers who saw the value of their homes and investment assets decline dramatically during the recent recession serve as a cautionary tale.

Resources abound to help you prepare for retirement. The research skills we use in our working lives as law librarians provide a platform for evaluating the reliability of the thousands of sources at our fingertips. Human resource staff in firm and academic environments, state and government retirement plan officers, and commercial financial institution such as banks and brokerage firms provide literature. Seminars offered at meetings of professional associations such as AALL chapters provide stepping stones to explore. Even if you don't expect to retire in the near future, you can start right now to keep an eye open for information about retirement planning. Tag information for inclusion in your “palm tree and hammock” file when the AARP Magazine begins to appear in your mailbox.

How the actual retirement process transpires will depend to a large degree on the policies and procedures of your own institution. If your institution has a succession plan in place, the library will have

an identified process to shape your transition. A succession plan outlines the methodology to fill staff vacancies at all levels of the organization. Such a plan provides the platform to identify, assess and train an organization's internal talent pool. The plan serves as an orientation and educational tool for the hiring team. A succession plan educates upper management about the skill sets needed to staff the law library and lays the groundwork for management support for library staffing initiatives.

A key consideration will be how much notice will be appropriate as the time for retirement arrives. While no employee wants to be viewed as a lame duck, the proverbial two weeks in advance of departure won't suit in most professional environments. If you know you will be expected to train your successor, communication with the hiring team about your job responsibilities will be a key factor in assuring a smooth transition.

Even if you have no direct role in the selection and training of your replacement, leaving behind clear documentation of your core responsibilities and procedures paves the way for your graceful exit and will endear you to both your remaining colleagues and your successor.