

Meet Al and Dorothea



Photo courtesy of Gloria Duffy

Let me tell you about Dorothea and Al Schoenstein. They are examples of retirees who have relocated from big cities and are bringing their skills to bear more than full time in their new, small-town home communities.

As regular readers of this column know, our family vacation home for a quarter century has been in the tiny hamlet of McCloud, at the foot of 14,000-foot, glacier-clad Mt. Shasta, 300 miles north of the Bay Area. We restored

a 1904 mill manager's house in the middle of town, a simple but roomy wood-sided country home with a big front porch, and enjoy it as frequently as possible with friends and family.

McCloud was once home to the largest lumber mill operation in the United States, with eight giant sawmills operating and several thousand workers in its heyday. One by one, through the past few decades, the mills shut down, until the last one closed a few years ago. The departure of the timber industry left McCloud with a dwindling population and a threadbare social infrastructure. Tourists come and go from this beautiful region to enjoy hiking, fishing, camping, cycling and water sports, but steady jobs are scarce. McCloud High School, with only five students currently, is always on the verge of closing down. Many of the families in the area receive public assistance.

A number of people from the Bay Area and elsewhere have second homes in and around McCloud, but we come and go and not many of us get involved in the community in a meaningful way. But that is not the case for Al and Dorothea Schoenstein. Al's now in his early 70s, tall and lean with white hair and a white goatee. His family business was manufacturing organs for churches and theaters at a factory in Benicia. Choosing not to follow the family craft, Al was a financial manager for Wells Fargo for 36 years. Gracious and pretty Dorothea is a *plein air* artist who paints California landscapes and does art restoration. A decade ago, they left their home base in Danville and built a retirement home in McCloud, with a studio for her art and restoration work and a wonderful organ for Al to play.

But their thoughts of a leisurely retirement were short-lived. Today they spend much of their time working for the community in McCloud, where folks with their professional experience and skills are rare. Al and Dorothea became active in the local Catholic

Church, organizing fundraisers and renovation work at the old log church. Al was elected to, then chaired, the board of the local Community Service District, which is responsible for the town management of McCloud. He's brought financial acumen to the administration of fire protection, water, sewer, lighting, snowplowing and the other services the board provides, and led the district to build a pavilion where musicians can play in the local park. He joined, then became president of the Mt. Shasta Rotary Club, leading Rotary volunteerism and fundraising for local causes such as trail maintenance, disabled sporting events and library expansion.

Dorothea can often be found behind her easel near a waterfall, mountain meadow or other beautiful natural scene around the region. But she also founded the nonprofit McCloud Arts Society, which this year is sponsoring its first season of music and arts events. These events draw people to the town, which creates business for local merchants and work for residents. She dragoons part-timers and locals alike to organize and support programs and to volunteer to publicize the events, staff booths, sell tickets and otherwise pitch in. At her request, together with another couple she recruited, Rod and I worked the ticket booth at a 5th of July blues concert and pyrotechnics display held at the new park pavilion.

Another event Dorothea has organized for September, "Paint the Town," will assemble artists in McCloud to paint the quaint old mill town and dramatic Mt. Shasta rising above it, then show their art downtown.

What Dorothea and Al are doing obviously doesn't fit the classic definition of retirement. It is full-time community service. They seem to be everywhere in the McCloud community, putting their shoulders to the wheel to improve the quality of life for visitors and residents alike.

Longevity today means that the active years in life can extend well beyond traditional retirement age. Many people can contemplate an entire second career after exiting the formal work world. Imagine how much improved rural – or for that matter, urban – communities would be with more full-time volunteers like Al and Dorothea, bringing their lifetimes of experience to the service of needful communities.

Sometimes Dorothea and Al sigh with tiredness at the end of a long day, and comment wryly on the absence of the relaxation they had planned for their retirement. But as far as I can tell, they are having the time of their lives. 🍷

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