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ENCORE

Lifestyles
Profiles in Retirement

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Pursuing a Love of Painting

When Jebby Potter was in her mid-50s, she had already made plenty of money in the real-estate business, but a life of working seven days a week had begun to take its toll. Ms. Potter, now 66, started suffering from migraines. Having always loved painting, she decided to take it up as a hobby in hopes of reducing stress. By the age of 59, her hobby had become a calling, and Ms. Potter quit the office for good.

"It took a lot of guts to walk away from the cash cow of the real-estate business, but I don't regret it for a minute," Ms. Potter says. "I just woke up one day and realized my tombstone could either read 'Jebby was rich and miserable' or 'Jebby made the world a beautiful place.'"

THE JOURNAL REPORT



Profiles in Retirement, a regular Encore feature, looks at the varied paths people are taking in later life. The profiles in this edition are by Kristi Essick, a writer in California. Send your comments about these profiles or how you're spending your own time in retirement to encore@wsj.com. We'll do our best to share your stories in these pages.

• See the complete [Encore](#) report.

Today, Ms. Potter is a professional artist, selling her oil paintings of birds, flowers, landscapes, dogs and children on her own Web site (jebbypotter.com) and in galleries in Florida, New York and Pennsylvania. She mostly lives off her retirement savings, but does make a bit of

extra money selling her work.

"When I retired, I started putting all of my energy into painting," says Ms. Potter, who paints for at least two hours every day and also does a lot of bird watching and hiking. "I feel I need to paint miles of canvas to get better, because I'm making up for all those lost years."

Nonetheless, she doesn't regret her career, especially because she was able to save enough money to enjoy a comfortable early retirement, as well as use her real-estate know-how to acquire some choice properties.



Jebby Potter

She and her husband Tom divide their time between a townhouse in Sewickley, Pa., and a desert retreat in Indian Wells, Calif., a location Ms. Potter chose because of the bright winter light and natural landscapes that inspire her work. She also inherited a cabin on Lake Chautauqua in New York, where she paints during the summer.

"I'm realistic that I could not have made a living as an artist," says Ms. Potter. "From what I make from my paintings today, I couldn't even pay the property taxes on one house."

Ms. Potter grew up in Beaver Falls, Pa., and graduated from Carnegie Mellon University with a degree in art in 1963. She quickly married and had two children, and then a few years later, her husband died in a car accident at age 30.

PODCAST: Jebby Potter discusses her [Having worked only two years as a high-school art teacher](#)

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work as an artist, which started as a form of stress relief but has since blossomed into a successful business that helps fund her retirement. [Listen to podcast.](#)

before she had children, Ms. Potter suddenly needed to find a job to support her children. Overhearing a friend at a cocktail party brag about

making \$3,000 for selling a house, Ms. Potter thought, "I could do that," and got her real-estate license. In her early 30s, she remarried and opened her own company, J.B. Potter Realty, which eventually included seven other agents.

"I was always on call," says Ms. Potter. "I remember being in the hospital and phoning in listings from my bed."

She sold her company to Prudential Financial Inc. in her early 50s, and began finding time to dedicate herself more seriously to painting, while continuing to work part time for the company. She took a correspondence course in bird biology to better learn to paint her favorite subject. Soon after, her bird paintings proved popular with a small gallery in Sewickley, and she began to sell her first canvases. That early success gave her the confidence to retire for good to seriously devote herself to painting.

"Now that I am finally doing what I love, I hope I can continue painting until I'm in the grave," she says.

Talking Up Cleveland for Boomers

Cleveland has been good to Morton Smith. He ran a box-manufacturing company in the city for nearly 30 years, taking over from his father, who started the company in 1931. Through the ups and downs, Mr. Smith, 82 years old, always considered Cleveland a great place to live and do business.

Now, he wants to convince retiring baby boomers that Cleveland should be their home, as well.

To that end, Mr. Smith has taken on the role of civic activist, promoting a plan to turn Ohio's second-largest city into what he calls the "Boomertown Center for Human Capital."

"Some 78 million baby boomers are soon going to retire, but most of them will still want to remain active, working part time, studying and giving back to society," Mr. Smith says. "I envision Cleveland becoming a center where older people can come to examine their own potential for a better future."



Morton Smith

Mr. Smith spends five to 10 hours a week making the rounds of city government offices, local universities and businesses, lobbying them to participate in his cause. He wants them to offer educational programs, jobs and incentives to boomers who want to move to Cleveland. Mr. Smith is talking with Cuyahoga Community College, for instance, about the possibility of a program that would train older adults for new part-time careers. And he recently met with the president of Case Western Reserve University to sell him on a similar idea. He is also working with Lee Fisher, the state's lieutenant governor, to develop incentives for businesses to move to the Cleveland area.

Mr. Smith also hopes to raise money for a nationwide marketing campaign to reach out to retiring boomers. He says he wants to spread the word that Cleveland not only has thousands of unfilled jobs for skilled workers but also is a wonderful place to live.

"My dream is nothing short of turning Cleveland into a world-class center of innovation, art, medicine, culture, industry and education, where older people can truly make a contribution to society," he says.

Mr. Smith grew up in Cleveland, born to Russian immigrant parents. After graduating from college and spending two years in the military, he took over the family business, Smith-Lustig Paper Box Manufacturing Co., in 1964. He served as president of the company until he sold it and retired in 1991. The company weathered a number of storms, emerging as the only box maker in the city after many other manufacturing businesses in the region failed.

For all his devotion to Cleveland, Mr. Smith does draw a line: He and his wife of 60 years, Gerta, now spend half the year in Florida. The winters in Cleveland aren't so lovely, he admits. Since his retirement, Mr. Smith has continued to work part time as an adviser to his former company and has spent time taking university courses and playing golf in Florida. At the same time, though, he longed for a bigger project.

"Just because I'm in my 80s doesn't mean I have nothing left to give to society," says Mr. Smith, who religiously does 45 push-ups and rides his bike each day. He says his father lived until he was 98 and his mother-in-law until she was 108, so he believes he has a lot of years left to work on his civic project.

"When I look around at retired people I know, I'm amazed at their vitality and enthusiasm, so why not help people foster that energy in Cleveland?"

Helping Others Get a Good Sleep

Glenda Sparling spent a major part of her working life on the road, logging long hours in airports and staying in hotels in unfamiliar cities. During many of those nights away from home, Ms. Sparling couldn't sleep, and she developed chronic

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insomnia. When she retired in 2005 at the age of 56, Ms. Sparling, who lives in Eugene, Ore., was looking forward to relaxing. But she couldn't.



Glenda Sparling

"Even though I no longer had the stresses and strains of work, I still couldn't sleep, because I had developed terrible habits," says Ms. Sparling, who, despite habitual use of sleeping pills, hadn't slept well in more than 20 years. "After one particularly rough night, I just woke up and thought, 'I'm done -- I have to change this.' "

Ms. Sparling began researching nondrug therapies for insomnia in hopes of finding a way to get a good night's rest without ever taking another sleeping pill. While the transition off medication was difficult and Ms. Sparling's sleep patterns didn't improve right away, she now sleeps better than ever before by engaging in relaxation techniques, getting regular exercise and eating healthy foods.



PODCAST: Glenda Sparling transformed her battle with insomnia into a successful Web site and e-book. [Listen to podcast.](#)

Inspired to share her story, Ms. Sparling wrote a book titled "The Spirit of Sleep," which she published in 2007 as an "e-book" available on her Web site, thespiritofsleep.com. The book chronicles her struggles with insomnia and offers practical tips to overcome it. While she hasn't sold many copies, she remains upbeat.

"If my book helps just a few people get over insomnia, that's great, because I know how debilitating this condition can be," says Ms. Sparling, who also offers "sleep coaching" on a one-on-one basis. "I'm not doing this to make money. I just want to help people help themselves."

Ms. Sparling started her career as a home-economics teacher in Canada in 1970. She got her master's degree in education from the University of Oregon in 1979, after which she planned to return to Canada to continue teaching. But, as Ms. Sparling puts it, "love intervened." She married and then went to work for pattern maker Stretch & Sew Inc. in the company's franchisee education department. In 1982, she and her husband set up their own company, Ranita Corp., which sold sewing patterns, manuals and implements to consumers via promotional seminars.

"Ranita was a very successful business, but it required us to travel virtually all the time," says Ms. Sparling, whose role in the company was to put on daylong seminars in cities in the U.S., U.K., Canada, New Zealand and Australia. "I would get up at 6 a.m., put on a seminar from 9 to 4, work through the evening, then drop into bed in a strange hotel at 10 p.m. to do it all over again the next day."

Though she would fall asleep without much trouble, Ms. Sparling would wake up at 2 a.m. worrying about all the work that needed to get done the next day. Suffering from exhaustion and migraines, she visited her doctor, who suggested sleeping pills.

The Sparlings shuttered Ranita in 2006, but only after socking away enough money to retire comfortably. Today, Ms. Sparling wakes most days feeling rested, which enables her finally to enjoy her retirement. She spends an hour or two a day updating her Web site and responding to emails, but that leaves plenty of time to work out daily, engage her passion for gourmet cooking and take long hikes in the mountains around Eugene.

One thing she doesn't want to do now that she's retired: travel.

"I've had enough of airplanes and hotels," she says.

A Life in Wine Leads to the Vineyard

As the owner of a successful retail and wholesale wine business, Marvin Stirman spent his life around wine. But he never fulfilled his most ardent wish: to own and run a vineyard. Now, at age 75, Mr. Stirman at least owns a piece of a fledgling winery in California's Napa Valley.



Marvin Stirman

"I had always dreamed of having my own vineyard in Napa, and when I retired, I set out to buy one," says Mr. Stirman, who lives in Silver Spring, Md. "Only I didn't realize how expensive land was in the Napa Valley, so I ended up buying the property with 32 of my friends."

Calistoga Estate Vineyards is a small winery set on 4½ acres in the northern Napa Valley. Mr. Stirman and his friends purchased the land for \$1.5 million in 2005, and have since spent time getting it ready for planting and renovating an old stone house on the property. Each of the owners spends a week a year in Calistoga, though Mr. Stirman tends to visit the property every couple of months to make sure everything is running smoothly.

And despite the fact that the winery's vines won't be mature for another four to five years, Mr. Stirman, who serves as the managing director of the venture, has already started making wine from another source, working with a Napa winemaker to create four blends with the Calistoga Estate label.



PODCAST: Marvin Stirman, a 75-year-old wine enthusiast and aficionado, discusses his newest

"I just couldn't wait to get started," says Mr. Stirman.

Mr. Stirman certainly knows a lot about wine, even if he's spent little time around grapes. He grew up in Washington, D.C., where his father ran a successful liquor

business venture, becoming a managing partner of a Napa Valley vineyard. [Listen to podcast.](#)

store. After Mr. Stirman graduated from the University of Maryland in 1951 and came back from a two-year stint in the Army, his father asked him to take over the business. He did, but focused it more on wine. The business grew into the largest wine store in Washington and also sold wines nationally via mail order. He ran the business for 25 years, until a property developer offered to purchase the acre of land the shop was sitting on in the city's Georgetown neighborhood.

Mr. Stirman then opened a wholesale wine-distribution business called Wines Ltd., which he ran for the next 25 years. He enjoyed that business even more than the first, because he got to spend his time traveling the world in search of wines to sell in the U.S., but he still wanted to take on the challenge of making his own wine. Mr. Stirman, who has five daughters, eight grandchildren and two great-grandchildren, retired at the age of 71 in 2004, soon after selling Wines Ltd. Well-off financially but utterly unprepared for a life of leisure, he soon grew restless.

"I didn't plan my retirement very well, and in retrospect that was a mistake," says Mr. Stirman, who grew bored after just one week of not working. "I am an avid golfer, but just how much golf can you play?"

His wife of 55 years, Phyllis, tired of seeing him mope around the house, suggested he finally pursue his passion to buy a vineyard; he made plans to fly out to California the next week.

"I was really only retired for two weeks before I jumped into the project of opening my vineyard," says Mr. Stirman, who now spends 40 hours a week visiting wine shops to market Calistoga Estate wines and organizing the planting, caretaking and maintenance of the property. "After a lifetime of being busy, I just couldn't take the inactivity."

A Simple Life in the Woods

Despite holding a Ph.D. and having worked as a professor for many years, Ed Aulerich never liked school. In fact, the reluctant academic -- and later successful businessman -- would have preferred to spend his life close to the land, living in the woods. Now, at age 73, he finally has his own patch of forest.

"I have 35 acres of wooded land with creeks and rivers where I putter most of the day," says Mr. Aulerich, who lives in Corvallis, Ore. "I plant trees, split wood, watch the otters, owls and wood ducks -- and that's all I really need."



Ed Aulerich

Over his long career as an academic and a business owner, Mr. Aulerich moved around a lot (he and his wife have lived in 36 different houses), but always longed to return to the Oregon outdoors. At the age of 16, he moved with his family from Iowa to Oregon and fell in love with the wilderness around him. "The woods just got to me," he says.

He worked summers during high school with the Oregon Department of Forestry building fire roads and clear-cutting trees, and he would have been happy to continue this path after graduation, but his father urged him to go to college. So he attended Oregon State University and studied forest engineering, graduating in 1960. He worked for two years at a timber company near Eugene, Ore., and then moved his family to Flagstaff, Ariz., in 1962 to help relieve his son's asthma.

"There were no trees in Arizona, so I went back to school," says Mr. Aulerich. "I always hated school, but I needed to learn a new job skill, so I got a master's degree in industrial statistics."

He became a computer-science instructor at Northern Arizona University, and then moved to Cheney, Wash., in 1967 to take a job as a statistics professor at Eastern Washington University. Further career moves took him to Idaho, where he worked for Potlatch Corp. and earned a Ph.D. in forest science from the University of Idaho, and then back to Oregon, where he began teaching in the forestry department at Oregon State, in Corvallis. After six years there, he quit the day he received tenure.

"I didn't like academia," Mr. Aulerich says. "There were too many people just sitting around all the time."

In 1979, he started his own company, Forest Engineering Inc. The company, run by his younger son since 2001, develops logging plans for private timber companies, including where to build roads and bridges during a clear-cutting operation. While running Forest Engineering, Mr. Aulerich traveled more than 250 days a year to oversee lumber operations in locales such as Chile, Ecuador, Tasmania and New Zealand. Today, he's still involved in the company but works only part time, in the mornings, so he can spend afternoons on his private wildlife reserve.

"I still help my son with the company, but I spend most of my time on my 'executive retreat,'" says Mr. Aulerich, who has been married for 54 years to his wife, Sylvia, and has three children, six grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

An amateur pilot, Mr. Aulerich also spends time flying his small plane. But he has no desire to travel, after a life of constant hopping from country to country.

"I live a simple life and don't want for anything," says Mr. Aulerich, who says the \$2,000 a month he makes working for his son, income from his retirement nest egg and Social Security allow him to live without financial worries.

"I got offered two highly paid jobs last year, one in Laos and one in Africa, but I don't need to do that anymore," he says. "I'm staying put."

Back to Work, This Time With Family

Jon Iverson has had a hard time calling it quits.

After retiring twice, he's now chief executive of a company again. This time, however, he's working alongside his son, building a company called Boulevard R. The company operates a Web site, boulevardr.com, that helps people plan for retirement.

"The second time I retired, I really planned to enjoy life -- plus, my wife made me promise not to start any more companies," says Mr. Iverson, 61. "Then this opportunity to create a company with my son Matt came along."



Jon Iverson

Mr. Iverson spends 20 to 40 hours a week in his role at Boulevard R, offering strategic guidance and helping with business development and fund raising. He also has helped finance the venture. Most of the time, Mr. Iverson works remotely from his home in Healdsburg, a small, picturesque town in Northern California; a few times a month, he stops by the company's offices in San Francisco.

Boulevard R is Mr. Iverson's fifth company. After struggling through college at the University of Oregon in Eugene ("I was not a good student; I barely passed with all C's"), Mr. Iverson began a varied career that included selling cash registers, working as a handyman and starting two successful computer-equipment distributors. In his early career, he worked as a salesperson for National Cash Register (the precursor of NCR Corp.), Computer Sciences Corp. and Digital Equipment Corp., but never took to being an employee.

"I just didn't fit into the corporate world," Mr. Iverson says.

His first big success came in the early 1980s, when he started a hardware-distribution company. Iverson Inc. would go on to become a \$10 million business. Mr. Iverson sold most of the company in 1987.

After spending a year in London with his family "to get a different perspective," Mr. Iverson returned to the U.S. and started a business selling imported consumer goods (including an ill-fated product called Beer-in-a-Bag). When that business flopped, Mr. Iverson set up another hardware-distribution firm, called Inlet Inc., which he ran for several years. But in 1997, he was able to take early retirement, thanks to a long-forgotten contract signed in 1983 when Iverson Inc. had traded some networking equipment for stock in fledgling financial-services firm TradePlus Inc. The company later became E*Trade and went public in 1996, making Mr. Iverson suddenly wealthy.

Retired at the age of 51, Mr. Iverson grew restless and started another company in 1999, an online insurance firm that went belly-up in 2001. This time, he decided to retire for good, purchasing 48 acres in Northern California in 2002 with hopes of spending the rest of his days on the rural retreat. He and his wife have since moved into a historic Victorian in downtown Healdsburg "to be closer to civilization," but they kept the land. Mr. Iverson spends a few hours a day on the property, where he has built roads, dug wells and installed a swimming pool.

Despite being a part-time CEO, Mr. Iverson says he feels retired. He takes classes in boat building, goes sailing and takes regular hikes. But he still enjoys thinking strategically about how to build a business, especially since he gets to work beside his son.

"I have a lot of knowledge about starting and running companies," he says, "and I wanted to share that with my son."

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