

RECOM

Retired Employees City of Mesa

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RECOM Executive Board

Message from the Board

What I Learned on my Vacation – or How to Lose All Your Money in One Week!

First, let me introduce myself to those of you who don't know me. My name is Lin Adams, and I have served as RECOM's Secretary for the past three years. I retired as a Commander from the Mesa Police Department in May, 2000, after working there for 26 years. Although I am retired from the City, I have managed to fill my retirement time by teaching classes at a local community college, working all the home games for the Phoenix Suns and Phoenix Mercury, doing a little private investigation work, and evaluating grant proposals for the federal government. So, I think I am sometimes busier now than when I worked for the City!

Now, for my vacation story. My trip to Italy started as a lark last July, when one of my friends said she was going to Italy in March and asked some other friends and me if we wanted to go. One friend, truly a seasoned traveler, immediately said she would go. I inquired when the trip would be, because I knew I would still be teaching in March. When I found out it would be during spring break, it

seemed at least fortuitous, if not "meant to be," that I should go. So, I paid for my airline tickets, all the hotels, and the train tickets from one city to another – pretty much everything, or so I thought!

From the moment I decided to go to Italy, I realized I just wasn't all that excited about it, even though everyone I talked to who had been there said they absolutely loved it. My friends were reading books about Italy, doing research on the Internet, and dreaming about the great a time we would have. I, on the other hand, just had no interest in it; yet I had paid for the trip, so knew I was going to go. I told my friends that they could plan the trip, and I would just tag along and do whatever they wanted to do. So, that's the background; now, here are my lessons learned:

1. NEVER sit next to the window on a 9-hour plane ride! I always try to get an aisle seat, but forgot to mention this to the person making reservations. By the time I realized I had a window seat and tried to change it, the plane was full, so I couldn't change. Bladders are not meant for cross-Atlantic trips, and trying to crawl over two people who are asleep is not a pretty picture!

2. LOWER your expectations. Remember the Peggy Lee song, "Is That All There Is?"...Well, that's me. I always think something is going to be better than it is, and then am usually disappointed. That's how I felt about the Sistine Chapel. When we entered the Chapel, there were probably a couple hundred students (mostly teenagers) already there, jabbering at a deafening pitch. For some reason, I thought the Chapel would be serene, but with all the kids talking, it definitely was not peaceful. Our tour guide also explained to us that the Michelangelo paintings, originally completed in 1512, had to be restored in 1984 because all the incense and candle smoke had turned them almost black! The paintings are indeed beautiful, and to think what Michelangelo had to go through is absolutely amazing; but the thought that they allowed something so valuable to be almost ruined really bothered me!

3. DON'T trust ANYBODY!! We were getting off the train in Naples (you know, the place known for its garbage and crime!), when three men in blue jackets grabbed our luggage and motioned for us to follow them. We mistakenly thought they were porters, but before we knew it, we and our luggage were about half a block from the station, and our luggage was put in the trunk of a car, and we were motioned to get in the car. These guys then told us they wanted 20 Euros each (about \$35 each) for rolling our bags to the car! We paid them 20 Euros total (still \$30) and told them that was all they were getting. It would have been "highway robbery," but we hadn't even gotten in the car yet! Shortly after we started to drive away, we asked how much it would cost to go to our hotel (approx. 30 minutes from Naples) and were told it would cost 200 Euros (about \$300)!! We were having silent heart attacks about then, but we had no clue where we were, so just kept letting him drive – and figured we'd be broke the rest of the trip! In retrospect, we were really dumb – and I was ashamed to think I put myself in such jeopardy!! We did arrive safely at our hotel, thank God, and when we got there, I immediately went inside and told the manager what our driver was trying to

charge us. The manager went outside with me and got into an argument with the driver, and the end result was that we paid 100 Euros, not 200. Needless to say, the driver didn't get a tip from us!!

4. NEVER travel with a large suitcase!! When we got to Venice, the water bus dropped us off at the closest location to our hotel, but we still had to walk about three blocks with our luggage. Three blocks of bridges, which means dragging our luggage up about ten steps and then down ten steps (too bad you can't hear my verbal explanation of the wheels going up and down the bridges!) – a very laborious experience, to say the least! Then, when we got to our hotel, which was built in the 1400's, there was no elevator, and the only bellman also served as the bartender and housekeeping staff, so wasn't always available to help with our luggage!!

5. PAY attention to the fine print! The first night in Venice, two of us went out to eat. We weren't starving, but wanted to get a little something into our stomachs. We ordered a liter of water to share (6 Euros), two small dinner salads (6 Euros each), and what we thought was a sea bass appetizer (10 Euros). When I ordered it, the waiter said it was for two people (big red flag I missed), so my friend said she would share it with me. We both saw that it said 100 grams after the description of the fish, but neither of us thought to ask what that meant – BIG MISTAKE!! The second red flag we missed was when the waiter brought the fish to us and took off some type of bread-looking dome covering the fish and then began to filet it, making a big display in doing so. Don't get me wrong, the fish was excellent and probably a little more than I would have expected in an appetizer, but certainly not like getting a big steak! When we got the check, it was for 132 Euros – almost \$200!! Apparently, the part about the 100 grams had to do with the cost being according to the weight of the fish!! So now I was really broke!!

Lest you think the entire trip was a disaster, let me tell you otherwise. There were certainly more good times than bad, but my "lessons

learned” came from the problems. One place that I found particularly interesting was Pompeii. I loved walking through the excavated city and imagining what it must have been like before Mt. Vesuvius erupted in 79 AD, totally covering it with ash! Another beautiful area was Capri, where we took a cable car to the top and looked over the town. The glass factory in Murano had many beautiful and expensive items to purchase (one of my friends bought a \$1,000 vase), but I was there after my special bass dinner, so was broke! The Coliseum in Rome was like a picture right out of the history books! And, of course, what would Venice be like without taking a famous gondola ride! So, all in all, it was a memorable time...and one for which I am still paying!!

Guest Speaker

When you were a kid, did you say: When I grow up, I want to sit in a windowless office crunching numbers, at a counter listening to people complain, in a car in 110 degree heat, in a basement entering data into a machine?”

Me neither. But that sometimes happened. Maybe even to you. Good news. Read on.

Pat Esparza, our speaker for March, took her own advice long before she presented it to others. After retiring twice, once from banking and then from a position as a federal investigator, Pat became active in her community. Those of you who watch the Planning and Zoning Board meetings will immediately recognize her as a member of that group. She has also run for a city council seat, and currently is the director of Mesa Life Options.

Suffice it to say that it's an organization that wants to help boomers stay involved in life. It's under the auspices of Mesa Community College and funded by the Virginia G. Piper trust and several other organizations – and it's nationwide. The point is, that everybody is

worried that all we boomers out there won't have enough to do in retirement – and hey – there are going to be 80 million of us soon! And of course, someone has finally figured out how much experience, talent, knowledge and skill walked out the door when we left.

So, if you're a recent retiree or retired a while ago and are thinking “This can't be all there is!” you're right. And you're in luck. **Mesa Life Options** wants to give you some ideas and some help in finding out what there is to do out there and how to get involved in what really interests you. (See the question above.) To that end, they've arranged for tours of various sites including the Phoenix-Mesa Gateway airport, the Mesa Arts Center and the courts building. They've had speakers from local non-profit corporations and organizations, and offered cooking, art and small business classes.

And if you think the schools need a little help – specifically from you – Mesa Life Options can put you in touch with **The Experience Corp.** This is a group that puts boomers into schools to help children with reading and writing. All they ask is a commitment of 1 to 2 hours per week.

By the way, thank you to all those who might be inclined to offer the writer of this column such help, but she wouldn't want to deprive the children.

More good news: Mesa Life Option's services are free. Just come to the office and sign up. You're welcome to come to the events, classes and even use their computers if you don't have one of your own.

Pat recommended a book by Mark Freedman entitled Encore. It describes what boomers across the nation are doing with their time. You might have noticed in the “Message from the Board” column that Our very own RECOM secretary, Lin Adams, gives a pretty good description of what she's been doing since she retired from the Police Department in 2000.

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Reports

Secretary's Report

In Lin Adams' absence Kathy Barrett reported that Julia E. Ehly passed away. Julia was a cashier in the Utilities Department and retired in 1981.

Benefits Task Force

The February and March meetings of the Task Force were cancelled because Council and City management were in discussions regarding the city budget for 2008/09. Sales Tax revenues were lower than expected and numerous reductions for all departments were proposed. One of the reductions was a "one-time reduction in contribution to the Employee Benefits Trust Fund of \$ 4.3 million."

An email inquiry to Donna Salemi resulted in the following response:

"Here is what is happening. When the budget was set for 07-08 and the tentative budget for 08-09, the City had planned on adding through premiums approximately 10.6% increase in this year's (07-08) and another 10.6% for the budget year beginning July 1, 2008.) Since the trust is doing well – over \$16 million in balance, it was agreed upon that the City would not add the additional 10.6% for the next fiscal year. Therefore, premiums will remain the same for 2009 for both retirees and active employees.

Should for some reason the Trust take a turn, upper management agreed that we could revisit the "contribution" issue during the year."

Program Committee

The next regular meeting will be held in the Community Room of the Fire station at Mesa

Dr. and 1st Street on Wednesday, April 16th at 9:00AM. The speaker will be:

John Bemish
From Home Depot

John will be discussing home improvement, including classes offered and other help for do-it-yourselfers. There will be substantial gifts and prizes donated by Home Depot, but alas you still have to do the work.

RECOM elections will also take place at this meeting. Since there is only one candidate for each office, election will be by acclamation, and no ballots will be passed out. Current directors are running for re-election to their positions, with the exception of Barbara Seperich. Bill Petrie is standing for the two-year term.

At the **May meeting the speaker will be Linda Burns from Hospice of the Valley**. Linda's presentation will focus on the end of life directives, particularly those relating to physical and mental health care, but also on other essential documents. Laws vary from state to state and even if you haven't moved, Arizona's laws are updated. This presentation will give you a quick overview of what's currently required in Arizona.

Announcements

The Board is planning a half-day pre-retirement seminar for City of Mesa employees on the morning of June 4, 2008. The City is providing the auditorium of the Conference Center free of charge. Speakers will include representatives from ASRS, Social Security, City of Mesa Benefits Dept., and financial planning. Employees will be allowed to attend on work time with the permission of their supervisors. Spouses are welcome. The capacity of the room is 120. First come first served. Information will be disseminated at work through the City's intranet.