SIX WAYS TO KEEP ACTIVE RETIRED MEMBERS ENGAGED      **Guest Blog Written by Joe Bertoni**.

The role that our retired brothers and sisters should play in their local’s affairs has no doubt been debated by many locals in our International union and, unfortunately, may at times be a source of friction within a local.

But it doesn’t have to be an either or proposition for the local to support both its active and its active retired members. For my local, the Fairfax County Professional Firefighters & Paramedics, Local 2068, the leadership and members have worked diligently to ensure that its active retired members are an integral part of the local’s operations. In taking this approach, and ensuring the involvement of active retired members, Local 2068 has helped strengthen and improve the local for all members. Further, the contributions of these active retired members have and will continue to benefit the local for future generations of new union members. Our active retired members serve as executive board and committee members, support a large and dynamic political action effort, and play significant roles in community outreach efforts. This spirit of cooperation and engagement has been nothing but positive for our local.

Several factors are critical to the success of any effort to keep active retired members involved.

**Fairness**. Is it fair to deny in a meaningful way a seat in the house of labor or local to an active retired member when in so many cases these brothers and sisters have dedicated their lives to defending that very institution through their loyalty, commitment and financial support? While it’s ultimately a responsibility for every local -- through their respective constitutions and bylaws -- to decide how and under what conditions active retired members can participate, locals would be wise to consider the issue  of fairness and to remember the words of President Abraham Lincoln” “A house divided against itself cannot stand."

**Leadership**. Another important factor is the attitudes held by leadership. If a local’s leadership, including the president and all other officers, welcomes and values the contributions of active and active retired members alike, many potential issues may never pose problems. But it’s not just about preventing problems; it’s also about making progress. With that in mind, positive and constructive attitudes from your local’s leadership will allow for an environment where active and active retired members thrive, working together toward a stronger and more progressive and inclusive local.

**Generational Expectations**. It’s likely that your current active members are Baby Boomers, Generation Xers and Generation Ys. But your active retired members are most likely all Baby Boomers. With such a diversity of generations and associated expectations, there will be challenges, especially when it comes to active vs. active retired issues. However, members and leadership alike must never lose sight of the common bonds that unite all of these generations – we are all members of the same profession, department, local, International and labor movement. The commonality of our shared experiences can be used as a significant and trusted starting point for discussions involving any potential active vs. active retired issues.

**Communications**. A strong communications effort is also key to initially engaging your active retired members and keeping them engaged. Effective internal communications efforts should include your web site, newsletter, email, Facebook and any other social media presence.

**Department Buy**. In I’ve spoken so about what a local and its members can do to make its efforts with active retired members a success. However, your department also plays an important part in engaging your active retired members. A positive response from a department in terms of access to department facilities, keeping active retired members informed of events, and having a welcoming attitude toward them will make a significant and positive difference in regards to any local's active retired outreach and retention efforts.

**Strong Retirement Association**. A strong retiree association that includes in its ranks and leadership an equally strong presence of active retired members can be of significant benefit in motivating and mobilizing active retired members to become more fully involved in their local. It helps keep the already engaged active retired members involved and brings those who may be sitting on the sidelines back into the life of their local.

We are seeing the average age of our membership rising, and with that increase will come a corresponding rise in the number of active retired members. So the question facing locals, their leaders and members is, how will these retired members stay active in the locals they helped to build with their loyalty, commitment and financial support?

Creating an environment where the active retired member wants to be involved and remain engaged makes practical sense as these members have accumulated a great depth of experience and stand ready to continue making a significant and positive difference in their locals as they did for so many years as active members.

That’s not to say it will be easy or without conflict or controversy. But by focusing on fairness and leadership, understanding and managing generational expectations, and having a strong communications effort, as well as department buy in and a positive and strong relationship with the department’s retiree association, your local can raise the participation of its active retired members to significantly high levels to the benefit of all members. Through this process, Local 2068 has become even stronger, more inclusive and more progressive.

**About Joe Bertoni**. Joe is an active retired member of Fairfax County Professional Fire Fighters and Paramedics, Local 2068, where he enjoys contributing and staying engaged with his brothers and sisters in the local. Joe spent the majority of his career as an investigator in the Department’s Fire Prevention Division. In addition to Joe’s involvement with his local, he is also the secretary of the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Retirement Association. He is alo a husband to a great wife of 29 years and a father of two wonderful and now-grown children.

**About the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department and**[**Fairfax County Professional Firefighters & Paramedics, Local 2068**](http://www.fairfaxfirefighters.org/index.cfm?section=1). The Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department is an approximately 1,400- member strong department operating out of a central headquarters and 37 stations in the northern Virginia area. Local 2068 is the sole IAFF affiliate representing approximately 1,800 active and active retired members.