

# Side gigs, front and center



## More seniors are working to supplement retirement funds

BY SHERYL NANCE-NASH  
Special to Newsday

**T**hink 20-year-olds are the only ones with a side hustle? Think again. Nearly a quarter of seniors aged 59-77 reported supplementing their regular income with additional work, according to a 2023 Bankrate survey. And with the high cost of living on Long Island, senior advocates said they have seen an increase in older residents who are taking on extra jobs to keep up.

“Among the population we see, people are taking side hustles not for fun money, but for necessity — to survive,” said Karen Boorshtein, president and chief executive of the Family Service League, a social service agency in Huntington.

Ann Glynn, marketing coordinator for The Life Enrichment Center at Oyster Bay, agreed. “Many seniors live off their Social Security and/or a small pension, so they need to supplement their finances to pay the bills,” she said.

But it's not all doom and gloom. While some seniors are working to make ends meet, others said they want money for discretionary spending or are trying to keep boredom at bay. And for those who need the extra income, several seniors interviewed said that while working into their 70s wasn't what they had planned, they have found fulfilling jobs that they enjoy.

Here are the stories of five Long Island seniors and their side hustles:

### 'ILL WORK. . . UNTIL I CAN'T'

At 79, Carmela Lancaster works two to three days a week at a gift and card shop in the Walt Whitman Shops mall in Huntington.

“I'll work at the store until I can't. I need that couple of hundred dollars I make every two weeks. I don't know what I would do without it,” said Lancaster, whose last full-time job was in 2008

BARRY SLOAN

Merle Lee-Lockwood, 60, will be retiring soon from a job as a project manager, and she plans to work for a health education company.

See **JOBS** on E18



NEWSDAY / ALEJANDRA VILLA LOARCA

Carmela Lancaster, 79, in black, leads a class at The Life Enrichment Center at Oyster Bay, where she volunteers. She also works two to three days a week at a mall gift shop.

# 'Retired,' but still working

**JOBS** from E17

as a teacher's assistant at a Catholic school.

She said she also worked for more than 20 years at the Disney Store as a sales associate, but the small pension she receives plus Social Security isn't enough. "We're still not making it," said Lancaster, who lives in Jericho with her husband, Donald, a former tractor-trailer driver who has health issues.

Lancaster said she enjoys her work as a sales associate, where her days can include manning the register and tidying up the store. "I'm a people person. I like helping people find the right card or if they need a second opinion on a gift."

Though there are days when her legs hurt by the end of her shift, Lancaster said she tries to look on the bright side. "I say,

**Among the population we see, people are taking side hustles not for fun money, but for necessity — to survive."**

— Karen Boorshtein, of the Family Service League

"Thank you, God, for getting me through this day." To be able to work at 79 is a privilege."

When she's not at the store, Lancaster and her husband can often be found at The Life Enrichment Center at Oyster Bay, where she volunteers and runs a senior chat group that discusses the latest news and other topics. She also likes the classes offered, including basket making, crafting, yoga and cardio drumming.

Her best advice for seniors looking for a side hustle? "Maybe volunteer someplace first," she said. "You'll get re-acclimated to working, meet

people and build a network that might lead to an opportunity that pays."

## HELPING OTHERS

Bruce Brown is a car guy. "I love driving, it's in my DNA," said the Syosset resident, 72.

For many years, he ran a taxi and limousine company. After retiring 10 years ago, Brown started volunteering as a bus driver for seniors, transporting them to doctor's appointments or to a senior center.

"I love people. It's like taking care of family," he said.

Six years ago, he said he began driving for Uber and

Lyft. While he collects Social Security, he said 50% of his income comes from his side hustle. He works mostly at night, for about 20 hours a week, often ferrying people into Manhattan or to an airport.

His wife, who is 72, works full time at a T.J. Maxx store. While she loves the job, Brown said it is also a necessity because it provides the family with health insurance. Brown said he contracted COVID-19 three times, which has had long-term effects on his lungs, and he is a cancer survivor.

When he's not driving, the father of two grown children

may be babysitting, as he is grandpa to six, ages 3 to 9. Or he may be bowling or kayaking. But don't look for him to stop getting people from point A to point B any time soon. "I always wanted to help," he said.

## A PASSION FOR FITNESS

Merle Lee-Lockwood, 60, is months away from retirement, but she is already working the side gig that she plans to focus on when she says *adios* to the 9-5.

The Brentwood resident is a project manager for a pharmaceutical company. However, she said she's long had a passion



LISA FAZIO



NEWSDAY / J. CONRAD WILLIAMS JR.

**Lisa Fazio, 62, who taught art in after-school programs for decades, now offers art lessons to adults. She also hosts one-day meditation and "self-discovery" workshops.**

**Valentina Janek, 71, started a networking group for older workers. She spun that into a podcast and a book.**

for fitness and health. At one point, she thought she would open her own gym. She taught fitness classes on the side, but her career took priority.

But once she's retired, Lee-Lockwood said she plans to supplement her savings by working as a coach for Wildfit, a health education company. She will also offer personal training and lifestyle coaching.

"One of the things I love most about being a coach is that I can spend as much time or as little as I want. I don't have a monetary goal, but I believe the sky is the limit, as the more I put into it, the more

I know I will achieve," Lee-Lockwood said.

She's looking forward to helping others: "If you love your body, feeding it what it needs, it will love you back," she said.

Lee-Lockwood has advice for other seniors considering a side gig: "Now is the time to focus on what you enjoy. Try to find something that doesn't feel like a job but feels like something you really look forward to doing," she said. "If you love learning, think about a new skill or hobby. Something that starts as a hobby could be something that oth-

ers would pay for."

**NOT SLOWING DOWN**

Valentina Janek's retirement years are all about the hustle.

Nearly two decades ago, Janek, now 71, was laid off from her job as an administrative operations manager. In her 50s at the time, she said she ran into difficulty finding a new job — so she got creative.

The North Valley Stream resident started a networking group, the Long Island Breakfast Club, for professionals 50 and older who had previously held high-paying jobs. It has since grown into a resource for

job hunting, resume preparation and other career help and led to the launch of her podcast, the Long Island Breakfast Club Show.

Janek has also written a book, "From Fired to Freedom: How Life After the Big, Bad Boot Gave Me Wings," and she offers coaching in job skills like interviewing.

She has no intention of slowing down. "There is no retirement account when you are left unemployed and not able to land a job with great benefits," said Janek, who collects Social Security.

And besides, the high-energy Janek added, "I love what I am doing, because I work with people who need guidance."

She also speaks at libraries, where she offers coaching at reduced prices. "I call it public relations in your pocket," she said.

When she's not working her many jobs, the grandmother of two said she enjoys spending time with friends.

Long gone, she said, are the days when she wanted to return to the corporate world. The gig life offers her a flexibility she didn't have before.

"It's nice making your own decisions and working with like-minded people," she said.

**FORGING CONNECTIONS**

Lisa Fazio said she taught after-school art programs for 25 years. These days, the Mineola resident, 62, is sharing her love of art with adults, teaching watercolor, acrylics and mixed media at her studio.

But that's not all: Fazio also hosts one-day workshops in meditation and "self-discovery," along with psychic parties. And she can often be found outside, painting commissioned artwork for weddings or special occasions.

The income from her various endeavors has helped her meet the financial challenges posed by the high cost of living on Long Island, said Fazio, who is not receiving Social Security yet. Despite being expensive, she has no plans to move. "I love the beaches, I love Long Island," she said.

Fazio said she particularly likes working with women 55 and older, as they can connect over shared experiences like raising children. She tries to empower her clients through her artwork and mediumship and said she's forged bonds with her students. They are company for her, she said, and in return she gives them the

gift of art.

One of Fazio's favorite quotes, which she tries to live by, is, "We're not here to see through one another, but to see one another through."

For seniors who find that in retirement they need extra income, she advised, "Do something that you love and it won't feel like work, but something that makes you happy. It's a win-win."

**RESOURCES**

If you're ready to pursue a side hustle, here are a few resources to get you started:

- Through a partnership between the New York State Office for the Aging and the online community GetSetUp, those over 55 can choose from hundreds of free online courses. Some that are upcoming include top seasonal job opportunities; exploring in-demand jobs for retirees; and training in technology like Zoom. Older adults can also get paid to teach classes. To learn more, visit [getsetup.io/partner/NYS-TATE](https://getsetup.io/partner/NYS-TATE).
- The state Office for the Aging has also partnered with the ride-sharing network GoGoGrandparent. It is a specialized service for older adults who need transportation, and there are also opportunities for employment as a driver. Learn more at [gogograndparent.com](https://gogograndparent.com).
- AARP has a directory of age-friendly employers, [aarp.org/work/job-seeker](https://aarp.org/work/job-seeker).
- The New York State Department of Labor also offers job listings at [dol.ny.gov/find-job](https://dol.ny.gov/find-job).

Ann Glynn, marketing coordinator for The Life Enrichment Center at Oyster Bay, advises older Long Islanders to contact their local senior center and ask whether they know of any available work. Seniors can also make an appointment with The Workforce Partnership program, which provides free job services, searches and skills training. The Hicksville office can be reached at 516-934-8532. Contact the Massapequa office at 516-797-4560.

—SHERYL NANCE-NASH