

Former aerospace employee offers direction

By Kathleen Schwar
Staff writer

Retirement came a little too early for George Foray of Horseheads.

Foray worked for Grumman Aerospace on Long Island for 35 years. But like many other workers, he suffered uncertainty over job security, humiliation over being laid off, and frustration at not having reached his financial goals by the time he was eventually forced to leave work.

Foray is seeking to turn his own pain from that time to good use. On May 30, he will lead a workshop, "Unemployed or Forced into Early Retirement?" at Misericordia Spiritual Ministry at the Notre Dame Convent in Elmira. The ministry is run by Sister Betty Hughes, RSM.

"I have so much to share that is useful about these experiences," said Foray, who has training in spiritual direction.

His own journey in recent years has been one of moving from anger and confusion to one of rediscovering himself, he said.

At Grumman (now Northrop Grumman Corp.), despite the fact he'd been selected to be a certified quality coordinator, the uncertainty of his employment often ate at him as the company began downsizing. He was regularly loaned out as a qual-

ity coordinator to various areas in the company. But at the times when he returned to his own department, he found himself being given fewer responsibilities — though keeping the same salary.

Eventually he was sent from the company headquarters in Bethpage to the Calverton office, driving 40 miles each way every day — in winter.

"I felt hurt," he said. "When you go through that kind of experience, you think, 'Where's God? You not only feel rejected, you feel alone. You start to go inward. You can't solve it. It's really not in your control."

"I decided to tough it out," he recalled. "But it was like robbing me of my final moments of glory in my career. Instead of walking out, feeling good, that you'd accomplished something ... none of that happened."

In the end, he was laid off March 10, 1994. Soon the company allowed him to opt for early retirement. He was 61, one year away from his retirement goal of age 62.

"They were holding different seminars and classes, informing us of benefits and so forth," he recalled. And the decision whether to accept retirement had to be made the morning of the seminars.

"We had our spouses with us. I remember sitting there. You had to make a decision what option you were going to take. For example if you took a 100 percent pension, if you were to die your wife would receive nothing. There were several options.

"I had worked the figures before this, but now it was crunch time. The real decision, was once you made it and signed it, it was locked in for the rest of your life. It was a terrible position. I don't know if there's ever any easy way to go through it."

The situation was even worse for workers with fewer years in the company, he noted. While he could get by or if necessary find a short-term job, those younger co-workers

were still raising and educating children, and had a hard time finding comparable jobs.

Yet he remembers being traumatized.

"I would get up in the morning, and fill my briefcase with papers and books, and go to the library for three or four hours. Then I'd go down to the beach and pray.

"I had to do a lot of soul searching, about where I was at and where I was going," he said.

"After a while, I said wait a minute now, this isn't the end of the world. I've got to get on with life."

His family and friends and his spiritual director gave him a lot of support, he added, as did journaling.

"What is really beautiful about looking back, is my wife (Dorothy) and I can talk about it and see where God was working."

Another help was a day of reflection at St. Clare Friary. He strongly encourages new retirees to seek such help with an experienced spiritual director.

"I came out with a list of skills and interests to get myself redirected," he said.

Foray had been trained through the Diocese of Rockville Centre as a certified prayer and retreat leader himself, and has done an internship for spiritual direction and mentoring with a Franciscan brother.

After retiring, he and his wife moved back to the Southern Tier, where they had lived briefly before settling on Long Island for 35 years. They joined the Church of St. Mary Our Mother.

Foray expects his workshop to begin as a listening session.

"Part of what I want to cover in the workshop is to try to get people to look at themselves, the gifts they have, the skills they have, and the interests they had when they were younger but forgot about," he said.

"The main thing is to provide a little bit of hope, that there is light down at the end of the tunnel. We are on a journey."

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