

The Good Life

Now That I Have the Time, I'm going to...

By Doug Hulette

W

hen Ron Tell '56 pulled his old cornet out of the closet a few decades after graduating, he found that he had mislaid some of the skills that had served him well during his four years with Princeton's marching band and concert band.

"I couldn't get a single sound out of it," recalls the Chapel Hill, N.C., resident. The horn went



Performing at his class's 50th reunion P-rade in 2006 brought Ron Tell '56 back to the world of music that he knew at Princeton. That's Ron and his cornet, third from right, among his classmates in the Born Again Band.

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back into storage until 2006, when motivation arrived in the form of an e-mail from classmate Bob Rodgers, who was recruiting for a band to march in the class's 50th reunion P-rade. Out came the cornet, and after a lot of practice and many lessons, Tell, a retired lawyer, played with joie de vivre with the 1956 Born Again Band.

And that was just the beginning. Since then, Tell has deepened his recommitment to music and honed his skills. He's now in his fifth year with both the concert band and swing band in his area's chapter of New Horizons International Music Association, a 20-year-old nonprofit organization that runs programs to enable adults to get into — or back into — making music.

“I thoroughly love it”

– Ron Tell '56

“I have to practice every day for at least 45 minutes to an hour,” in addition to attending band rehearsals three times a week for the various gigs they play, he says. “I thoroughly love it, and I assume it's also helping to keep my gray matter active, or maybe even growing a little bit!”

What Tell calls his “learning adventure” is an increasingly common phenomenon these days, as retirees gain free time to pursue artistic passions that fell by the wayside during years dominated by work and family. At the same time, retirees are embracing the “active arts” as part of an increasingly popular focus on active adult lifestyles and life-



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long learning. Underpinning the trend are Americans' lengthening lifespans and shrinking chance of major physical impairments in their later years.

Tell's reference to the salient effect of his trumpet-playing on his gray matter reflects a broad and growing concern among retirees. In their Healthy Brain Initiative, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Alzheimer's Association describe "the burgeoning demand" of older Americans for ways to maintain cognitive function. (Details on the research initiative are online at cdc.gov/aging/healthybrain/roadmap.htm).

Indeed, retirees who explore their "active arts" potential and other inner talents through organizations like New Horizons often reap benefits that go far beyond the personal satisfaction of a good performance. New Horizons operates 178 bands, orchestras, choruses and other ensembles, mostly in the U.S. On its website (newhorizonsmusic.org), New Horizons cites a 2008 survey of more than 1,600 of its musician members that found most cited "emotional well-being and benefits, followed by physical well-being, cognitive stimulation and socialization benefits." Other research cited by New Horizons found that those who participate in music activities (both music listening and music making) often place considerable value on the nonmusical benefits of music activity. Importantly, research has found that such activities can improve older adults' perceptions about the quality of their lives.

Princeton alums are taking

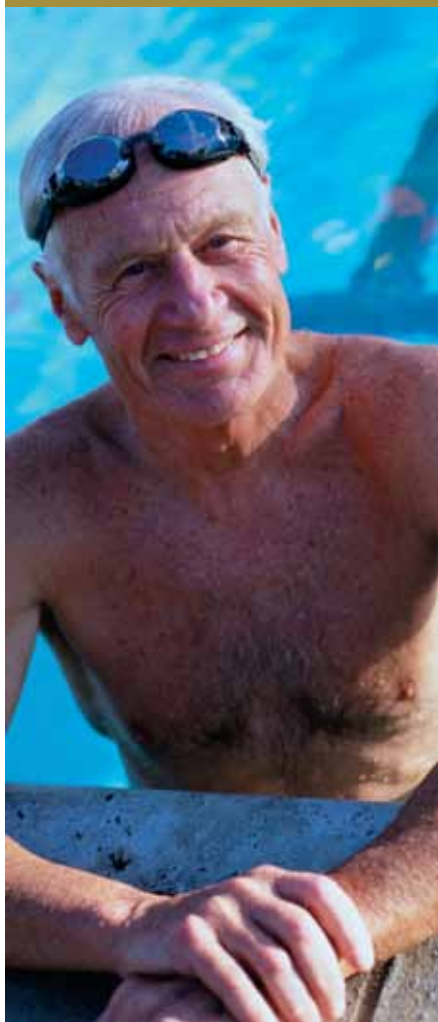
"(folk dancing is) a nice combination of using your body and your mind at the same time."

— Lew Douglas '65

diverse paths in pursuing their artistic passions. Lew Douglas '65 found his niche in folk dancing, which he describes as "a

nice combination of using your body and your mind at the same time." A math major at Princeton, Douglas performs with the

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Active Arts

Retirement communities are responding to the demand for “active arts” programs by offering more opportunities for residents to resurrect old musical, dance and performing skills or develop new ones.

Choral groups are especially popular. At White Horse Village in Newtown Square, Pa., the White Horse Village Singers number 80 members, up from just 16 in 2001. The group performs twice a year for residents and also entertains at nearby hospitals and schools.

www.whitehorsevillage.org

At Princeton Windrows, the Windrows Warblers perform for the annual staff-appreciation party as well as other occasions. Resident Dick Armstrong '46 organized the Warblers several years ago.

www.princetonwindrows.com

At The Forest at Duke, in Durham, N.C. (where Ron Tell '56 and his swing band sometimes perform), the Forest Singers rehearse weekly and perform four or five gigs a year, including some “on the road.” www.forestduke.com

Stonebridge at Montgomery, just outside Princeton, has the Stonebridge Singers, who last year began a performance-exchange program with a local elementary program.

www.stonebridgeatmontgomery.org

Kicking it up a notch are The Rockers of Pennswood Village in Newtown, Pa. Concentrating on rock 'n' roll hits, the group aims to bridge the generation gap. Student musicians from the nearby George School are joining The Rockers in concerts this year.

www.pennswood.org

Play-readers' troupes are popular outlets for active creativity among retirees in community settings, and the groups often perform several plays or musicals each year. At Meadow Lakes, a play-readers group has evolved into a drama group. www.meadowlakesonline.org

Meadowood, in Worcester, Pa., also has an active play-reading troupe, along with a popular chorus that gives major performances twice a year, and a square-dancing group. www.meadowood.net

At Carol Woods Retirement Community in Chapel Hill, N.C., a jazz combo has jam sessions once a month and three concerts a year at the community's assembly hall, and also performs in the community. www.carolwoods.org

Applewood Estates, in Freehold, N.J., built a performing-arts center in 2007 as part of a major expansion. The center is home to a popular theater group, chorus and orchestra, and outside groups use it for practices and rehearsals. Applewood last year opened a “music suite” that includes a digital piano with attached keyboards and monitors, as well as an organ and other musical needs.

www.applewoodestates.com

Retirement communities also put together exhibitions to display the work of their resident artists. Last August, Meadow Lakes hosted the annual Mercer County Senior Art Show and also hosts the annual New Jersey Senior Citizens Art Show. In April, Meadowood will sponsor a juried show that will feature work by its own residents as well as members of the surrounding area.



Lew Douglas '65 with a fellow member of the Jubilee American Dance Theatre during the group's trip to France in 2008.

nonprofit Jubilee American Dance Theatre near his home in Oakland, Calif., while also working at UC, Berkeley. Among the fringe benefits of his dancing: gigs in Russia and France in recent years and a special bonus — he met his fiancée through the dance group, and they plan to wed this summer.

Win Rutherford '64 takes his passion for the arts to another level, using his singing skills to raise money for charity. A member of the Tigertones all four years at Princeton, Rutherford has built a second career in singing in addition to his regular job as a partner in a New York law firm. His many artistic activities include about four decades of performing in New York's Blue Hill Troupe, which produces a Gilbert & Sullivan operetta each spring, a Broadway musical each fall, and several concerts around the city every winter. Proceeds go to various New York-based charities.

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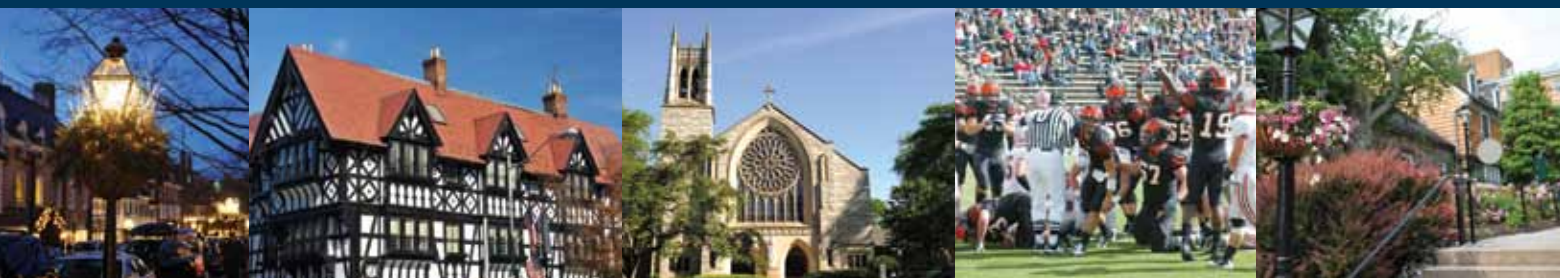
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"It's a lot of fun," he says. "I love doing it. I've kept a very active amateur singing career as well as a very active law career." Of his singing he adds, "It's like a sport. If you're not in shape, you might as well hang it up."

Also keeping his vocal cords active is fellow New Yorker Todd Sollis '68, who recalls being recruited for Blue Hill Troupe while he was singing in the men's room of Rutherford's law firm, where Sollis was a young associate. At Rutherford's urging, the former Nassoon auditioned. "That was the beginning of a still ongoing passion for performing with the troupe that has lasted over 35 years," he says.

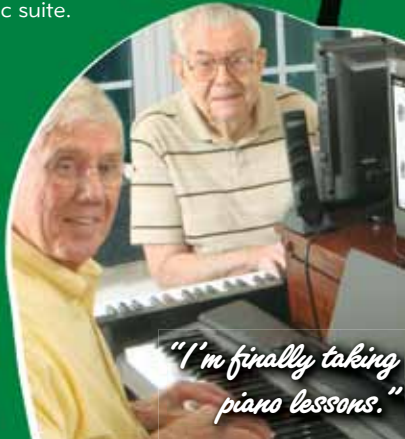
Russell Marks '54 has added an "active" element to his artistic pursuits. Not content with working on flat canvas, the

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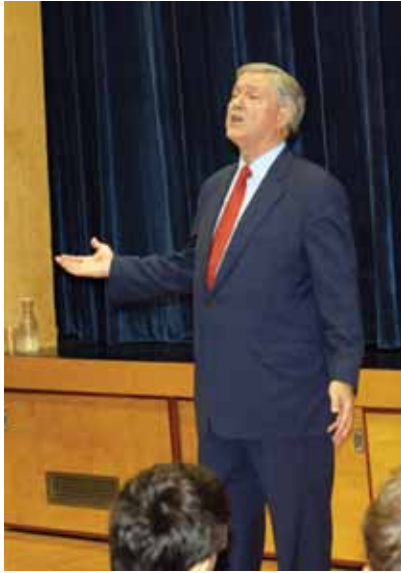
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Win Rutherford '64 sings at The Buckley School during an October assembly. He credits the New York City school with inspiring him to a lifetime of singing.

Princeton Windrows resident now creates large (up to four feet square!) hanging sculptures made of wood and other materials painted in bright acrylics, and has shown them in numerous juried and solo exhibitions. One of his works hangs in the business office of the Woodrow Wilson School. "It wasn't until I was retired that I had the time for art," he says. By the way, he published his first novel after retiring, and has nearly finished with a second. ■

"That was the beginning of a still ongoing passion for performing with the troupe that has lasted over 35 years"

- Todd Sollis '68

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