

Posted to Newsroom on 02/02/2015  
Updated on 02/02/2015 02:39 PM

## Friendships, Memories Rekindled in Retirees Club

*Networking group is open to new members -- and you don't even have to be retired*

By [Steve Schuster](#), Associate Communications

Days like this are reminders of how working at CareFirst is about being part of a large family. Smiles, laughter and fond memories filled a tent on the green rolling hills of the Country Club of Maryland in November when nearly 70 members of the BlueCross BlueShield of Maryland Retirees Club gathered at a luncheon and shared memories of their years at CareFirst.

Nearly every month, dozens of former associates and some of their spouses gather to talk about their years of CareFirst service and rekindle the friendships forged while working for this company or one of its forebears.

If you want to know what the company was like before the turn of the century, before desktop computers and even before it was called CareFirst, this is the place to be. Among those who gathered at the group's luncheon in late November, there were collectively hundreds of years of experience with the company and just as many memories about their former co-workers and the good times they shared.

"It's a great way to keep in touch with old friends and make new friends," said Margaret Smith, the Retirees Club's secretary.

It's also a true networking event -- with all the social graces online networking sites like Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn lack. The meetings are conducted over lunch, which usually includes your choice of surf or turf. Prizes are raffled, and upcoming field trips and community outreach events are planned. During the last few weeks of 2014, the Retirees Club collected non-perishable food items for the Assistance Center of Towson Churches and traveled to Washington, D.C., for lunch at the Old Ebbitt Grill, and a stroll through the Ice exhibit at National Harbor.

The BCBS of Maryland Retirees Club was formed in 1981 and now has about 190 members, including officers, board members and committees. It's also open to new members.

**Slideshow:** [Photos from the BCBS Retirees Club luncheon.](#)



But calling it a retirees club is a bit of a misnomer. You don't have to be retired from CareFirst or any other company, for that matter. In order to join in on the fun and become a club member, the only requirement is that you must have worked at least five years for the company and be at least 55 years old.

For example, Smith still works for CareFirst as a system software engineer in TOS, and Judy Joyner, another club member, is a sales assistant in the Large Group SBU. Harry Fox, also a card carrying member of the Retirees Club, is in his 43<sup>rd</sup> year of service at CareFirst, and presently works as a Senior Account manager in Large Group.

If you spend time to talk with the club's members, particularly those who worked for CareFirst several years ago, you'll realize this: The more things change, the more they stay the same. Sure, technological advances, increased regulation of health insurers and the Affordable Care Act have made this a much different company than the one John Siegel, a club member, worked for from 1968 to 1987. But many of the activities and community atmosphere he and other associates of yesteryear enjoyed are still engrained in the company's fabric today.

"We used to have bowling and softball leagues," Siegel said. "It was very social and was nice to be part of such a great family." These days, associates from CASCI to Columbia still meet outside the office to [participate in social sports leagues](#) for flag football, softball and other sports.

CareFirst also is still known for the associate recognition club member Susan Slaysman recalled from her days working in HR before retiring in 2008 as the Delaware Blue's human resources director. Throughout her 37 years with the company, Slaysman said she was continually impressed by how the company rewarded associates for meeting customer service and sales goals.

"It was always nice to see people come together to celebrate and recognize associates for the hard work they did each day," she said.

#### **Membership Has Its Privileges**

Interested in joining the BCBS Retirees Club? If so, send an email to Margaret Smith at [margaretsmith1157@gmail.com](mailto:margaretsmith1157@gmail.com). A nominal membership fee is required.

Meanwhile, the company's focus on its members has remained consistent since the day Joyner joined the company in 1979, she said.

"Customers still have the same needs and expectations, and we have to meet those expectations by offering a good product and good customer service," Joyner said.

Joyner and Fox bring a similar perspective to the Retirees Club meetings. Both club members have worked for the company long enough to witness the company's growth during the 1980s, financial struggles of the early 1990s, unsuccessful attempt to convert and sell to WellPoint Health Networks in the early 2000s, and the ongoing tech revolution spurred by CEO Chet Burrell's hiring in 2007.

Today's version of CareFirst is a company many of their Retirees Club members wouldn't recognize. The typewriters and rolodexes that sat on their desks at the old Joppa Road office in Towson have been replaced by PCs, iPads and Polycoms in offices throughout Maryland, D.C., Northern Virginia and West Virginia.

"We've come a long way since then," Fox said. "Where did the time go?"



[Comments and Story Ideas](#)