

UCSF Retirees Association Celebrating 40 Years of Connection, Purpose, and Lifelong Impact

By Paula Hermann

When UCSF staff members retire, their commitment to service doesn't end — it simply evolves. For 40 years, the UCSF Retirees Association (UCSFRA) has provided a vibrant community where former staff stay connected, continue to give back, and find new meaning in the next chapter of life. As the Association marks its 40th anniversary, its members reflect on how their involvement has filled their lives with friendships, adventures, and purpose.

Connection and Purpose

“At UCSF, you can serve forever,” quips new UCSFRA board member Wanda Ware, summing up the spirit that has defined her post-retirement years. After a 20-year career in facilities and development, Ware craved connection after stepping away from full-time work. A UCSFRA event opened the door.

“I was so used to being busy all my life, I had to adjust to not having things to do consistently,” she recalls. “After attending the UCSFRA fair shortly after retiring, I realized they had volunteers, programs, classes, workshops, travel opportunities, and I thought, ‘Oh my gosh, this is what I need to do.’”

Ware now helped lead the 40th anniversary planning committee and spends 40% of her time on UCSFRA activities. “I’ve met so many incredible people — nurses, engineers, faculty — and I’ve found purpose and joy again.”

That sense of purpose runs deep. For 40 years, UCSFRA has offered something rare: a formal space for retired staff to stay informed, engaged, and valued. Monthly events range from educational workshops and museum tours to health webinars. The holiday luncheons consistently draw the largest attendance. UCSFRA even represents retiree voices at the systemwide level through the Council of UC Retiree Associations (CUCRA), ensuring policy decisions around health care and benefits are shaped by those they impact most.

Adventure and Growth

For longtime member and former UCSFRA board president Vickie Leow, the Retirees Association brought community and adventure when she needed it most.

“I was freaking out before I retired — I didn't know what I'd do with my time,” she recalls. That changed quickly. Leow joined the board, chaired the programming committee, and became a travel ambassador for the UC Retirees Travel program. From Ireland to Egypt and Japan to the Canadian Rockies, she's helped retirees explore the world while forging deep friendships.

“Some are solo travelers who’ve lost a loved one or felt nervous about going alone. We ensure they feel included. I’ve seen people come alive again on these trips.”

At the heart of UCSFRA is the belief that retirees still have so much to offer — and want to remain connected to UCSF’s mission. MaryGayle Thomas, an active member of the UCSFRA Lunch Club and former academic assistant in Orthopaedic Surgery, says the group helped her become active again, moving from “vegetating” on the couch to leading a weekly memoir-writing class for other seniors.

“It’s easy to feel isolated in retirement,” she says. “This group gave me structure, connection, and new friends. It helped me realize I wasn’t done growing, learning, or contributing.”

Service and Recognition

The impact of UCSFRA extends far beyond social programming. Through the **Frances Larragueta Award for Volunteer Service**, named after the Association’s visionary founder, the group honors members who demonstrate exceptional community commitment. Past honoree Bob Herman, a retired healthcare administrator and global medical volunteer, says the award reflects the group’s ethos.

“It’s about inspiring others to serve. Retirement doesn’t mean stepping back; it means stepping into new opportunities to lead.”

Decades of Deep Impact

Founded in 1985 by a small group of visionary staff with the support of then Chancellor J.R. Krevans, UCSFRA was created to ensure retirees remained informed, supported, and socially connected. Today, the organization boasts more than 1,000 members who carry forward that legacy of service.

As we conclude 40 years of lifelong learning, connection, and service, its message to new and soon-to-be retirees is simple: you belong here. Whether you’re looking for a book club, a hike through Angel Island, or a community of peers who understand what life after UCSF is really like, UCSFRA is ready to welcome you.