

Local's film explores active retirement

By Sam Warren
Special to The Journal

ITHACA — What do people do when they retire?

Most expect days of rest instead of days of work, year-long getaways instead of week-long vacations and simple living instead of the hustle and bustle of employment.

But local retirees know that easy living grows dull without activity.

When local director, performer, producer and author Sue Perlmut recently retired, she faced a difficult question: now what? At a loss for an answer, "I decided to write a play about it."

That play became the hour-

long documentary, "101 Ways to Retire—Or Not," that premieres at 7 p.m. Friday, June 22 at the Women's Community Building, 100 W. Seneca St.

The film features retired community residents sharing their experiences and ideas about the real implications of retirement. From a series of interviews with nearly 50 retirees,

co-producers Perlmut and Christopher Julian compiled a list of 101 ways actual retirees stay active and satisfied, including biking through Ireland, climbing a mountain or two, chanting, teaching courses and designing a Web site.

The film focuses on eight local retirees with helpful and
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often humorous insight into retirement. Ben Nichols, a socialist mayor of Ithaca from 1989-1995 and a steadfast political activist, speaks at length of his unusually active retirement. Natasha Tall, a spirited senior citizen who appears in two other Julian productions, shares her high-energy retirement activities and her experience of the loss of a spouse. Tony Liu, co-owner of The Orchid Place, discusses the experience of starting a small family business after retirement. Thirty to 40 on-the-street interviews fill the film with additional anecdotal experience, providing a rich look at retirement in our community and elsewhere.

Conveyed but not shown in the film is the collaboration of Perlmut and Julian.

Since graduating from New York University with a master's degree in educational theater, Perlmut has found employment as a director and producer of theater, a performer and an author. She has lived in Ithaca for 25 years, teaching at Keuka College, directing community theater (particularly plays written by Carol Kammen), directing the senior citizen theater troupe at Lifelong and writing plays herself.

Julian earned a degree in film from Binghamton University in 1994 and an associate's degree in communication from Tompkins-Cortland Community College in 2004. She is an adjunct professor at the community college. He has worked in the Ithaca area for 11 years as a freelance film and video producer, director and editor and has been involved with several area films, including "Healthy Homes," a Cornell Cooperative Extension instructional DVD about indoor health hazards, and last year's "Invisible Ink," a fiction film played at Fall Creek Pictures.

Perlmutter and Julian were introduced during auditions for "Invisible Ink." When Perlmut received a 2006 CAP II grant from the Community Arts Partnership to write and direct a play about retirement based on interviews with retirees, she hired Julian to film each interview. As soon as the pair completed the first filming, Perlmut informed Julian that, "This is not going to be a play. This is going to be a documentary."

Perlmutter and Julian chose each interviewee from a large number of volunteers.

"I chose from three hundred or more people," Perlmut said. "Everyone I asked had someone to recommend."

Although the "101 Ways" list resulted from anecdotal experi-

ences discussed in many interviews, eight retirees formed the focus of the movie.

"(Tall) was articulate," Julian said. "She spoke about (losing a spouse) so clearly, but with such emotion."

Liu, too, was a favorite.

"He's a wise old man with a devilish grin," Julian said. "He has such a dynamic presence. Everyone who sees him wants to see more!"

The film's music producer, Robby Aceto, is a veteran collaborator, producing music for three other Julian productions. "(Aceto) can do anything. If I ask him for electronica, bluegrass, something upbeat, soft piano, hard drums, he'll give it to me."

Perlmutter enjoyed producing the film enough to come partially out of retirement. Close To Home Productions, Perlmut's upstart entrepreneurial effort, expects to produce another film soon.

"I'm my own boss," Perlmut said. "And I'm still retired."

Julian's freelance video production company, Christopher Julian Designworks, continues to provide video filming and editing service, but Julian hopes not to produce soon.

"Production is difficult, since any one shot is a huge effort," he said.

He and Perlmut plan to collaborate on two future films.