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## Baby boomers urged to rethink future

[By Lisa Petrillo]

Just because members of the largest generation in U.S. history are graying doesn't mean they should fade away like overwashed blue jeans.

No, California professor Stephen Barnes said, he wants to teach baby boomers to tackle old age like professional wrestlers.

Barnes, who teaches at San Diego State University, pioneers a higher education exploration of the challenges facing the baby boom generation as it - his own boomer self included - hurtles toward retirement age.

Barnes' class and curriculum aim to prepare boomers to reach not for the expected - like the retirement condo outside Phoenix - but for something he has dubbed "The Second Adulthood."

One becomes a born-again adult by grasping this key lesson, Barnes said. "First adulthood is what you do because you have to. Second adulthood is what you want to do."

This matters, because the 78 million boomers born post-World War II to 1964 have transformed society at every stage. Experts predict they likely will transform their retirement the way they did politics and rock 'n' roll.

"Sixty is the new 50," Barnes said.

He and his fellow instructor, Patrick Davis, want to challenge boomers to rethink their next 20 years - their retirement and beyond. That's what brings them to classrooms at

SDSU for the semester-long course, and to shorter mini-boomer seminars they hold countywide, including ones through Palomar College and the city of Oceanside, Calif.

One of their students, Vicki Root, is so ready for her second adulthood that she's not waiting for the final exam to write her obituary.

The gloomy exercise in self-examination that Barnes and Davis assign as a major term paper has energized the 50-something schoolteacher like her own personal moon launch.

"It's made me realize there's so much I want to do yet," said Root, who hopes to rewrite her life story to change the ending from the expected.

The idea for the boomer course came to Davis when he realized his life's ambition - and it bored him. He had worked in executive recruitment, aiming toward retiring early and spending his sunset years by the sea on a golf course.

So a few years ago, he left Oregon to retire in Oceanside. But after six months, endless rounds of golf failed to hold his interest and he returned to college searching for answers.

At San Diego State he found Barnes, an education professor, and together they started thinking deeply about all boomerhood. That is to say, themselves.

The co-instructors want it to be known that though the calendar says they're hovering over 60 years of age, they personally can attest to how not old they are.

"I ride a motorcycle," said Davis, whose curriculum vitae features a photo of himself posing in black leather by his hulking machine.

"And I mountain bike and surf, well, boogie boarding now. I hung up the surfboard ... too hard on the knees," said Barnes, dressed in a hippie-grows-up attire of crisply ironed denim shirt adorned with a kicky palm-tree necktie.

It's a Wednesday night and they've gathered 20 students in their graduate-level SDSU education course. Technically the three-credit course is Applied Critical Thinking for Adult Learners. But their subtitle is, "Baby Boomers: What Are You Going To Do For The Next 20 Years?"

Students learn the major defining characteristics of the differing generations - all of whom are represented in the class, the Greatest Generation-ers who defeated Nazis,



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catastrophic drought and economic collapse; the boomers defined by rock 'n' roll, civil rights and the man on the moon. Even a few from the still-to-be defined Gen-Xers and Gen-Yers show up weekly.

All this rethinking of self and one's place in the historic demographic leads to the final exam for the baby boomer students. They write their own detailed obituary to figure out who they are, how they got where they are and where they want to go.

"The lifeline will be tough, there's some painful memories," said boomer student Rosemary Luongo, 55. "At one time I thought I was fearless. Maybe this will take me there again."

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