Social Security Matters

Ask Rusty: Optimum Time For Wife's Benefits

By RUSSELL GLOOR
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Dear Russ: I would like some advice on the optimum time for my wife to start drawing her Social Security. Pertinent facts are: I am 11 years older than her (born in 1949) and waited until my full retirement age to start my own Social Security. She made significantly less money than I did so I understand she will be able to file based on my record instead of hers. If that is true then I would like to know how to maximize her monthly benefit by starting at the best age for her. I am not concerned about lifetime benefits as we both have a good chance to live long lives.

Also, I read she will be able to continue my benefit after my death but that doesn’t make sense so am skeptical of that. Please clarify and also advise if she should start at FRA or wait until 70.

Signed: Need to Know

Dear Need To Know: If your wife is 11 years younger than you, I assume her birth year is 1960, which would make her full retirement age 67. Since your wife “made significantly less money” than you, she should first look at the value of half of your benefit and also what her own retirement benefit would be at age 67. If the difference is substantial and she wouldn’t make more by delaying past her full retirement age, even up to age 70 and earning delayed retirement credits on her own benefit, then her focus should be on optimizing her spousal benefit.

If you’re financially able and her health is good, waiting until she reaches age 67 will yield your wife her highest spousal benefit amount. Her full retirement age is when she will get the full 50% of your “primary insurance amount” (or "PIA") — the amount you are entitled to at your FRA plus any COLA increases. If she claims benefits any earlier, they will be reduced to as little as 32.5% of yours if she claims as soon as she is eligible at age 62.

Please note that her benefit will be comprised of two parts — the first part being her own retirement benefit, and the second part being a supplemental amount to bring her up to the spousal benefit she is entitled to. Whenever she files, she will be deemed to be filing for both her own benefit and her spousal benefit, and since spousal benefits don’t grow beyond one’s full retirement age, she need not wait any longer than that to apply.

As to your second question, if you should predecease your wife, she will indeed be eligible to collect 100% of the amount of your benefit at your death, provided that is more than her own benefit, and provided she has reached her full retirement age when she applies for the widow’s benefit (she doesn’t have to take it immediately upon your death). In the event of a continuously early death, her surviving benefit can be taken before her wife reaches FRA — as early as age 60 — but they will be reduced to less than 100% of the benefit she was receiving (the reduction amount would depend on her age when she takes her widow’s benefit).

Please note that the widow’s benefit would replace her spousal benefit; it’s not in addition to it. Lastly, for widow’s benefit purposes, her full retirement age would be 4 months earlier than her normal retirement age, in other words 66+8 months rather than age 67. This is due to a special Social Security provision, which benefits a worker’s surviving spouse.

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To submit a request, contact the Foundation at ssadvisor@amacfoundation.org, or visit the Foundation’s website at amacfoundation.org.

Lauren Mazzzone Earns Doctorate At Northeastern University

Lauren Mazzzone of Quincy recently received her Doctorate in Physical Therapy (DPT) from Northeastern University.

VETERANS IMPACT DAY, SPRING SHOPPING DAY

A group of military service members enrolled in the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University recently volunteered their time and efforts to help spruce up the Sheila McIntyre House in Quincy. The house is one of Father Bill’s & MainSpring’s (FBMS) homes for formerly homeless veterans.

Besides their landscaping contributions, the Harvard students ate lunch and spent some with McIntyre House residents as part of Veterans Impact Day organized by Harvard’s Center for Public Leadership. The units at the Sheila McIntyre House, located on Burnin Parkway, are among the more than 500 permanent, supportive housing units operated by FBMS across Southern Massachusetts for formerly homeless individuals, families, and veterans.

Father Bill’s & MainSpring’s programs for veterans include housing, homelessness prevention, employment assistance, and emergency shelter. Father Bill’s Place, the agency’s emergency shelter in Quincy, provided overnight shelter to 113 veterans in need during fiscal year 2017. The Shopping Days, which are also held during the holiday season, allow people who are struggling financially to pick up some essential items for themselves and their loved ones they wouldn’t be able to afford otherwise.

Many of the clothing items for the guests were generously donated by Reebok. At Father Bill’s Place, the agency’s triage team works with guests daily to try to end their homelessness and/or connect them with outside treatment they may need. In fiscal year 2017, the Quincy shelter helped move 108 guests into housing and 55 guests into treatment programs such as a hospital or a substance-abuse recovery center.

JUNET GROGAN holds a pair of socks that were donated to Father Bill’s Place in Quincy.