

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

A new wave of (older) workers

Retiring baby boomers could create a new workforce

BY MEGAN PATRICK-VAUGHN | of the VBJ

By 2012, AARP estimates one in three workers will be 50 or older – and inching dangerously close to traditional retirement age.

All eyes in the workforce development community have been on the “graying” workforce and the drastic shortage of skilled workers that is projected to follow when baby boomers begin to retire en masse. The U.S. Department of Labor projects the country will be short 10 million skilled workers by 2011.

But because of the sheer size and idiosyncrasies of the baby boomer generation, some workforce experts believe those retirees could create a new workforce.

“Baby boomers have tended to reinvent every decade they’ve been a part of – every one has been a ‘me’ decade,” said Tracy Reilly-Kelly, Clark College’s mature learning program manager. “Because of our sheer numbers, we have had no choice but to affect social change.”

“The baby boom age has a greater number of people in the workforce than any previous group in history,” said Lisa Nisenfeld, executive director of the Southwest Washington Workforce Development Council. “A lot of people have the idea of life as tied to working and have an attachment to working. It’s how you define who you are. The idea of sitting down and amusing ourselves doesn’t work.”

– are paying attention because the movement may mean a growing industry for training.

Those with four-year degrees can return to school to earn a certificate or two-year degree to “reinvent” themselves after 65. And those who may not quite be at retirement age but are 50ish may be thinking, “Now what?” Reilly-Kelly said.

“They may not be in a career that holds the deepest meaning and recognize that they have many years ahead of them,” she said.

To prepare, Clark College – which has a 35-year-old

Initiative, created to support baby boomers as they retrain for second careers past retirement.

The initiative is a three-and-a-half year effort identifying a pilot group of two-year institutions that will create or expand campus programs to engage the 50+ population in learning, training and retraining programs and volunteer, civic and service activities.

As part of the program, Clark received a \$70,000 grant spread over three years that enables the college to cover operations, salaries and marketing.

The initiative is funded by a \$3.2 million grant to the AACC from The Atlantic Philanthropies.

Ten other community colleges were chosen as demonstration colleges – AACC member colleges that have not developed or are in the early stages of developing a Plus 50 program.

As a mentor college, Clark

Washington has the highest number of people 50 and older attending community colleges in the country.

Source: American Association of Community Colleges

This adds up to a population that may choose – or need – to continue working past traditional retirement age.

Institutions of higher learning – especially community colleges

mature learning and personal enrichment program – was chosen as one of five mentor colleges in the American Association of Community College’s national Plus 50



Submitted photo

(Left to right) Tidewater Port Captain Brian Fletcher is joined by summer HR intern Melisa McVicker, Tidewater Head of HR Hollie Hemenway, summer purchasing intern Cody Cook, summer administration intern Cathy Stewart and Richard West, a deck mechanic with three years of service following the first formal class of Tidewater apprentices.

Filling the maritime workforce pipeline

For business, the numbers are pretty clear that there are soon to be more people leaving the workforce than entering it, said Lisa Nisenfeld, executive director of the Southwest Washington Workforce Development Council.

“If businesses lose their highly skilled core and replace it with trainees, they’re going to be in big trouble,” she said.

The maritime industry is one in particular facing shortages as baby boomers look to retire.

Vancouver-based Tidewater has had particularly low turnover in its history, especially among those who work on the vessels – some employees have been with the company for 20 and 30 years, said Head of Human Resources Hollie Hemenway.

“Given that, it’s easy for a lot of companies to become complacent when they have low turnover,” she said.

The company has developed aggressive apprenticeship programs, one of the core goals of which is to provide a stream of trained workers when baby boomers begin to retire.

The company has worked with the state of Washington to develop the program, which can have as many as 15 apprentices at a time.

“We will be hit hardest on our vessels,” Hemenway said. “We have about 120 employees who work the river system – that area and our maintenance yard is where we will see the most retirements in the next few years. We’re working to prepare for that so it doesn’t come as a surprise.”

Tidewater also has met with several maritime companies in the Vancouver-Portland metro area to share ideas, processes and recruitment strategies in terms of creating a skilled workforce to prepare for the shortage.

Nisenfeld said the SWWDC is willing to work with companies and groups to plan ahead to make sure training opportunities at community colleges and apprenticeship are explored.

“There is no magic bullet, but we have tools at our disposal,” she said.

Growing industry for training

The traditional retirement age of 65 was set at a time when 69 was the average age of death, Reilly-Kelly said. Now it is common for people to live well into their late 80s.

“That’s almost 25 years past retirement,” she said. “Has anybody saved enough money to live another 25 years? Baby boomers are not typically good savers, so probably not.”

The other major difference is that baby boomers are characterized as needing to have great meaning in their work and lives and tend to be workaholics, Reilly-Kelly said.

will redesign its small business development curriculum to offer second careers through business ownership and at a wine and cooking school for wine hobbyists and food enthusiasts. The college also will partner with the Southwest Washington Agency on Aging to train in-home caregivers.

As the other key part of the initiative, Clark will provide program guidance and support and collaborate with its demonstration colleges, Western Dakota Technical Institute in Rapid City, S.D., and Chaffey Community College in Cucamonga, Calif.

Now, Clark is supporting WDTI's efforts to develop and pilot a national training model for baby boomers who want to become seasonal rangers and interpretive guides at national parks. Representatives of the institute spent three days in Vancouver at the end of August to focus on the college's proposed programs for the next three years.

Chaffey plans to start a new program for baby boomer volunteers to mentor and tutor underprepared students to help them be successful in college.

Workforce motivators

As to whether a new workforce will be born out of baby boomer retirees, Nisenfeld said it is pretty clear there will be a significant wave of retirements

occupations. However, workers in primarily intellectual jobs may choose to continue their careers for personal or financial reasons.

Some may choose not to retire



Jenny Shadley_VBJ

Elson Strahan, president and CEO of the Vancouver Historic Reserve Trust, and national Plus 50 Initiative directors Mary Sue Vickers, Katya Nekrasova, Tracy Reilly-Kelly and Kim Morey familiarize themselves with the Vancouver National Historic Reserve. The leaders were in Vancouver at the end of August.

for those in careers with fixed retirement benefits plans that aren't fully dependent on the stock market.

High-retirement occupations likely will include those in public works, construction and other physically challenging

because they can't afford health care coverage and have a health challenge, Nisenfeld said.

"This is a large motivator for a lot of people," she said. "It could change the paradigm of health insurance in this country because we typically attach

health insurance to work."

The workforce community has discussed creating a program like AmeriCorps for retirees, but instead of a stipend or wage, participants could earn health insurance. Nisenfeld said the concept has been well received.

There also may be more people joining the Peace Corps or seeking second careers in fields they didn't have a chance to explore when raising a family. There has been a wave of teachers and Employment Security Department employees retiring at the 30-year point, and Nisenfeld expects there may be many home-based, start-up businesses in the works.

There also has been great interest from retiring teachers to become business owners, and from business owners to become teachers, she said.

College benefits

"We're in the student business," said Reilly-Kelly, who is Clark's Plus 50 Initiative director. "Part of the aim (of the program) is to increase student enrollment because we create revenue to support our costs. ... We make more revenue if

we have a higher number of students, so what could be better than mass mounts of people retiring then returning to school?"

Nisenfeld expects people will gravitate toward careers in which formal training isn't substantial, with the exception of earning teaching credentials.

Reilly-Kelly expects second careers to be diverse and that training needs will be split into three categories: Training for lower-skilled workers; for those with good skills and who are good students but will need a decent amount of training; and corporate training that will take place in existing workplaces.

The latter may take place in workplaces where those of retirement age represent a significant brain trust and there aren't a lot of workers waiting to take their jobs when they retire.

"That raises the question of how companies will be trained to reinvent themselves to accommodate their highest level workers and keep them," Reilly-Kelly said.

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