

Older American Program provides jobs, activity for elderly citizens



Seleta Gantt works quietly at a table. The sounds of a busy office swirl around her—telephones ringing, typewriters clacking and Muzak pouring in softly from overhead speakers.

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for each of these older individuals, and both knew they must find a fulfilling, time-passing activity or a fog of unhappiness would settle around them. "At home I felt I was losing ground, growing old," Gantt admits.

Just when they were on the brink of despair, landing jobs gave them hope. Within 12 days of each other during the summer of '78, both were hired by the Forest Service's Regional Office to work in the Older American Program.

Ellis and Gantt are two of 47,500 who are employed nationwide by the Older American Program, which originated with the Older American Community Service Employment Act of 1975 and is funded in part by the Department of Labor. When the Department of Labor has made its allocation for the current fiscal year, each employer must contribute an additional 20 per cent of that figure to its individual program.

The Older American Program is designed to provide employment and training for those 55 or over who are at or near the poverty level, says Jim List, program manager for the Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Region. The older person should have either a skill or a skill that can be developed, he adds.

"Our society is youth-oriented. The program helps bring these older people back into the mainstream," List says.

Ellis and Gantt are two of eleven

older people now employed by the Forest Service's Regional Office who have come back into the mainstream. One other person developed a skill working in the Older American Program and was hired away from the Forest Service by private industry.

Marthella Bailey, special programs coordinator for the Forest Service in Portland, says of the thirteen who have enrolled in the program since she began coordinating it in December, 1977, twelve have been successful.

The only failure occurred when one woman failed to meet physical requirements because of a drinking problem, she says. People working in the program must pass an annual physical examination paid for by their employers. Their employers also pay for transportation to and from the job site.

Both Ellis and Gantt heard about the Older American Program third hand. Ellis learned about the opening when McKinley Burt, an accountant and a Portland State University professor who knew Ellis through the contracting business, told a mutual friend who told Ellis.

Gantt's daughter told her about the job. "She heard it from her hairdresser, who thought the job might be right for me."

Gantt says she always wanted to do office work, but when she was younger persistent stereotypes channeled her into becoming a cook. So when she got the office job with the Forest Service—filing, answering

phones, typing, etc.—her optimistic outlook on life returned stronger than ever.

"This way I have something to look forward to," she says. "I felt like I wanted to meet and help other people, and this job gives me that opportunity. I get more enjoyment out of this than I've gotten out of any other job."

Ellis also faces the world more optimistically since landing his job in the Forest Service's drafting department.

"It (the Older American Program) has been quite a booster," he says. "At a certain age you don't go out on the labor market and have a chance of landing suitable employment." Since getting the job, his self-esteem has risen as has his income.

Ellis and others in the program can work a maximum of 1300 hours each year, and are paid no less than minimum wage. As skills improve, they may earn slightly more, but not enough to jeopardize their social security income. Added to a social security income of approximately \$3,000 is about \$4,000 a year (gross) the program enrollee brings home. The \$7,000-per-year income makes life a little more comfortable for people like Ellis and Gantt, what with double-digit inflation, and with social security payments that respond to inflation too slowly.

The extra income allows the older people to buy some things they want, some things they can hang on the skeleton of basic essentials.

"You never outgrow wanting things no matter how old you are," Ellis says. "You get a new hat and you want a new pair of shoes."

Adding to their comfort is a work environment suited to a pace they

can maintain. "When someone says, 'Go do such-and-such,' I feel no pressure like it's something I've got to run and do right now or else."

Program coordinator Bailey enjoys the Older American Program, but for different reasons than Ellis and Gantt. What she savors most is the rapport that grows between her and the older people. "They become part of the Forest Service team," she says.

Bailey sees changes transform the older people who come to work for the Forest Service. "Seeing people have dignity and joy renewed in their lives; seeing them develop skills and self-confidence; seeing them feel needed; watching them being productive in their senior years; seeing that change on their faces; those are the things that are most rewarding to me."

Unfortunately, no new permanent positions are expected to open at the Forest Service's Regional Office this summer, but List says temporary positions may be offered if more Department of Labor funds become available. Permanent positions with the Older American Program are opening up in other parts of Washington and Oregon, especially in rural areas, he says. There are 264 older people working for the Forest Service in program jobs in various parts of Oregon and Washington.

Even if the program can help only a few older people, it does provide a ray of sunshine in a world of gloom. Those interested in applying for the temporary positions should contact the Oregon Employment Service, 1407 S.W. 4th Avenue, phone (503) 229-5005.

Meanwhile, older people may be helped by Congress' raising the mandatory retirement age to 70 that

went into effect January 1, 1979. According to Senator Mark Hatfield, R-Ore., 400,000 to 600,000 older people nationwide are expected to work at least until they are 70 because of the new law. Some will be helped by it.

Others, such as Ellis and Gantt, will find their niche in programs like the Older American Program, which

has helped the words to the song Gantt heard as a child come true. "I believe I'm in that heaven (that the song speaks about) now," she says.

(Jeff Petersen is a summer employee of the USDA Forest Service regional office in Portland. He will return to the University of Oregon this fall as a senior in journalism.)

OAU elects new chairman

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President of the host country to become Chairman of the OAU for the ensuing year. The role of a Liberian President in charting the critical course of Africa toward speaking as the outgoing Chairman of OAU, attacked President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania for allegedly being unwilling to negotiate, at the Conference Table, differences with Uganda. In his response, Nyerere insisted that OAU must first condemn Idi Amin for starting the conflict by invading Tanzania.

In West Africa, the relations between economically powerful Nigeria and economically depressed Ghana remain tense, after Nigeria's President General Obasanjo rebuked Ghana for mass execution following the recent military coup in Ghana.

The most explosive African problems, with a burning time fuse, center around the liberation movement and affect of Zimbabwe-Rhodesia and Namibia.

This, then, is the troublesome backdrop for the African "Mediator" and "Peacemaker," William R. Tolbert, Jr., President of Liberia, to assume the Chairmanship of the OAU for the next year.

It is a tradition of the OAU for the

greater unity and stability is not new. Twenty years ago, the concept of a Nationalistic Organization to foster the cause of African unity and to fight colonialism and imperialism was advanced by President William Tubman of Liberia. That meeting, held on Northern Liberia soil, at Sanniquellie, was the genesis of OAU.

Now, President Tolbert, a Baptist minister who formerly headed the World Baptist Alliance, takes over the mantle of leadership for OAU and all of Africa, at a very crucial period in which the world's great powers, the United States, Great Britain, Russia, China, and France have become active in competing for international influence in a continent lavishly rich in natural resources. There is no doubt that Africa has emerged as the new frontier of the world.

With this in mind, the African heads of state, including Egypt's Sadat, met at the 16th summit with an intense seriousness of purpose to find solutions to their complex and explosive problems, without outside intervention.

This is the charge and challenge facing OAU Chairman Tolbert for the next twelve months.

Prison Poets

Julius Snowden,
Editor

After The New Rain

Rainbow of new
I looked at your brightness and freshness
And inside I grew;
Into your many colors,
I looked and saw the colors
Of the world.

You came and no longer is mother (earth) thirsty;
You came after the rains
That clean the air in which you sit;
Half in, half out of the mother we respect.
Together... air and earth
In harmony, both...
And coming out of Mother's earth after the storm,
When the air is clean, standing tall, looking towards
The sun saying "Yes, big brother you who I am part of,
In harmony with all."

by a red brother of O.S.P.
who wishes to remain anonymous

The Emptiness Inside

Inside these four grey walls and bars of steel, my home?
The fleeing shadows creep into my cell, finding me alone
Upon my rack, broken, defeated, I've lost sight of a goal
Cold harsh figures of loneliness surround my troubled soul
So many seemingly endless nights, longing to hold you near
My arms reach out, only emptiness found. Alas, you're not there
Though in my mind's eye I see a love once growing strong
Sweet memories of your happy smile when we were one
Locked away from love and life—each day passes too slow
Been down so very long, I wonder where did all our dreams go?
As sleep finally comes, for awhile I can forget the pain
In dreams of us together hand in hand we now stand again
A soft kiss and quiet talks or foot races across the beach
So near, yet so far away, past boundaries I can't reach
Together again and onward we go, you have me, I have you
But sunshine breaks the morning air; another day comes to view
The warmth of your nearness fades, a tear swells inside
Facing reality, the emptiness returns and all alone your name I cry

by George Cates #40395

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