

For Older Workers, Employment is Scarce, Not Impossible

By Brian Stimson
Of The Skanner News

For many Oregonians, the dream of the golden years of retirement — those leisurely days filled with nothing to do but watch Wheel of Fortune and fret about kids walking on your pristine lawn — well, they've gone the way of the three martini lunch.

From 1977 to 2007, the number of workers aged 65 and older has doubled. For those 75 and older, while making up less than one percent of employed people in 2007, employment has increased 172 percent. In 2009, there were more people aged 55 and over in the labor market than has been since March of 1962.

Since 1995, there have also been more seniors employed in full time positions than ever before. It may come as

no surprise, but those older Americans who find themselves in need, or want, of a job often have a harder time finding one, according to the Bureau of Labor and

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In Oregon, Marietta Schlumpf of Seniors Make Sense, helps those reentering the job market gain much-needed experience and confidence. Schlumpf's program, part of the federal govern-

ment's Senior Community Service Employment Program, pairs low-income seniors with paid community service training jobs and then helps them find unsubsidized

employment. But like anything in this "jobless recovery," this program isn't able to help all of those who need it.

"Our funding was cut 25 percent nationally," Schlumpf told The Skanner

News. "That means that suddenly we had to put a freeze on new people."

Since the fall of 2010, there has been a waiting list for seniors seeking employment assistance. That list has since grown to over 300 people who need skills and a job.

In rural areas of the state, things aren't any better. The organization that handles the federal senior employment program for rural counties, Experience Works, says they face additional hurdles. Director Mary Miller says many seniors they serve face problems relating to homelessness, food insecurity, transportation and health care access that aren't easily solved in areas short on services.

Like all of the federal government's programs to provide seniors with paid community service work, participants are limited to making



125 percent of the federal poverty line. Many are turned away.

"We had a lady who made 38 cents over in a year," Miller said. "We couldn't serve her."

Both Miller and Schlumpf say the community service program helps employers realize the benefits of hiring older workers. It also helps seniors acclimate to the modern day workplace and brush away insecurities they may have about their abilities and own self worth.

"As employer's have aged, they've become much fonder for older workers," Miller said. She said many seniors have strong work ethics, take the job very seriously and build their life around a job. For employers hiring part-timers, they could do a lot worse.

Schlumpf blames misconceptions of older workers as a major part of the unemployment problem. Worries about learning, memory and longevity are overblown.

As for older workers themselves, she said they shouldn't give up on the job search, even though it is taking much longer than in years past.

"It's important, no matter what, even though it's hard, to stay positive," she said. "That does seem to make a difference."

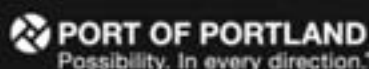
She said it's also important to get out of the house and circulate with other people.

"I think people do better to go out to where employers are looking for employees," she said.

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Selected candidates will gain firsthand experience in operating a small café including:

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- Human Resources
- supervising personnel
- scheduling
- employee leadership
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- menu engineering
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Hours and schedule will be event based and will include early mornings, late nights and some weekends. Selected candidates must agree to the expectation that the schedule will vary based on business needs.