

PARENTS TALK BACK

Pediatric surgeon takes on bullying

Dr. Li Ern Chen was training as a surgical resident at Washington University in St. Louis when she saw a peer humiliated in the operating room. It wasn't the first time.

A well-known surgeon was the teaching physician in the room. He would interrupt a resident's work if he or she made the slightest move he didn't like. The surgeon would instruct the doctor to stop working and go stand in the corner.

"Put your instruments down and step away from the table," Chen recalls him saying to his trainees in the middle of a surgery. If the doctor being reprimanded was engrossed in treating the patient, the surgeon would rap his or her knuckles with a metal instrument before sending the doctor to the corner, she said.

"It was awful," Chen said. "People would come out of the OR crying."

The doctor's behavior was legendary and tolerated for years, she said. Hundreds of people had witnessed it, but no one ever spoke up or challenged him. He has since left the institution. Even though Chen was never personally targeted by him, it made a lasting impression on her.

"In academic medicine, there is very much a hierarchy," she said. "The people at the top have the power. They also have the ability to abuse the power."

Chen made it her mission to flatten that hierarchy.

Chen said she didn't feel she could make a difference by speaking up as a resident, because she was in a culture that tolerated that doctor's abusive behavior. She has now made it part of her life's work to create a different culture — on a much larger scale.

She now oversees surgery departments in 19 hospitals in Texas. She has instituted a standard of mutual respect among surgeons, nurses, residents and students in the operating rooms.

"They will treat all people with respect," she said. Otherwise, she takes corrective action. "People are not allowed to get away with it."

Challenging highly trained colleagues is not without personal risk. The norms and routines of a clinical practice, like any ingrained or habitual behaviors, are difficult to alter, according to a commentary by Dr. David Shearn in the Western Journal of Medicine. That would appear to be especially true for the high-pressure stakes of an operating room, where the surgeon literally holds a patient's life in her hands. Attempting to change years of tradition on top of years of training could cause a revolt by those invested in an older system.

It was for this stand that Chen was honored recently, along with four other groups and individuals at the HateBraker Hero Awards in St. Louis.

Susan Balk, the founding director of HateBrakers, said the goal of the nonprofit is to encourage ordinary people to "hit the brakes" on bullying and hatred. At this year's awards, the organization honored individuals and groups from around the country, including a group of students from Old Bonhomme Elementary School near St. Louis. The kids demonstrated outside of their school after learning that a driver had shouted racial slurs at an African-American crossing guard at the school.

"I believe we learn from role models," Balk said. She described the honorees, including Chen, as heroes who showed moral courage. They disrupted a cycle of abusive behavior or violence by educating and leading.

"We should be celebrating that kind of triumph publicly," Balk said. The awards program noted that Chen confronted bullying and hazing, and these reforms have reduced errors and benefited patients, as well as the health professionals.

As a pediatric specialist, Chen has worked with hundreds of children and their families. She hopes parents also impart the same idea to their kids as she pushes in the OR: Everyone is different, and everyone brings something valuable to the table.

"It's not about how old you are or how smart you are or who your parents are," she said. There are some individuals who cannot feel good about themselves unless they are putting people down, she explained.

Along with repairing broken bodies, she set out to fix a broken system.

She had taken an oath to heal, and is keeping that promise in more ways than one.

Aisha Sultan is a St. Louis-based journalist who studies parenting in the digital age while trying to keep up with her tech-savvy children. Find her on Twitter: @Aisha.S.



AISHA SULTAN
Parents talk back

By ADAM ALLINGTON
For The Associated Press

CHICAGO — A new poll says more than 40 percent of America's baby boomers stayed with their employer for more than 20 years. But it's unlikely that their children or grandchildren will experience the same job tenure.

The survey of more than 1,000 Americans 50 and older by the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research shows that 41 percent of those employed workers have spent two decades with the same company, including 18 percent who've stayed at least 30 years.

But it's a trend more common among the older baby boomers than younger ones, and traditional pensions appear to be one of the driving factors.

Among those who have had at least 20 years with a single employer, the survey found that about half are excited about retirement, but a third are anxious about their post-work lives.

David McQuinn, 61, is retiring Tuesday after 30 years with MiTek, a construction and engineering firm in suburban St. Louis. He says there were times he thought about leaving but he liked his co-workers and his senior position and also owned stock in the company.

"I started working young and I've been a man in a hurry my whole life," he says, "and now I'm in a hurry to not be in a hurry."

His experience exemplifies a trait among boomers: more attachment to the company than the younger generations. But even among older Americans there's a gap in employment tenure: Half of those aged 65 and up but only a third of those age 50 to 64 have stayed with the same employer for at least two decades.

The shift may be less about differences in attitude than changes in jobs — and benefits.

About two-thirds of those who stayed with one employer for 20 or more years had a pension, according to the survey, compared with only a third of those who had never stayed that long with one employer.

Those defined benefit pension plans are slowly disappearing. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that only 18 percent of private workers were covered by these plans in 2011, down from 35 percent in the early 1990s. More common now are plans like 401(k)s, which are more portable from one employer to another.

The agency has reported that a larger proportion of older workers than younger workers had



AP Photo/Jeff Roberson

David McQuinn poses for a photo in his office at MiTek, a construction and engineering firm, Tuesday, May 10, in Chesterfield, Mo. McQuinn, 61, is retiring Tuesday after 30 years with the suburban St. Louis company, a length of time with one employer that is unlikely to be achieved by many younger workers.

more tenure on the job. For example it said, in January 2014, the average tenure with the current employer was 7.9 years for people 45 to 54, compared to 10.4 years for those 55 to 64.

"Think of all the choices people have today. I mean, who ever heard of a social-media analyst five years ago?" says Joe Coughlin, the director of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's AgeLab.

Coughlin says higher churn in the labor market also means companies will have to work harder to hire and retain the workers they need, and this creates leverage.

"Millennials think this way instinctively," he said. "They've seen their parents laid off by these large corporations, so there is less trust."

Christina Guerrero worked in the mid-1980s as a housekeeper at Austin's Brackenridge Hospital before applying for and getting a job as a clinical assistant.

She kept that job for 17 years, before moving to a neighboring children's hospital. Lifting children into hospital beds, she recalls, was easier on her back than moving adults.

"I thought about looking for other jobs, but almost any hospital these days would require me to go back to school to finish my GED,

so that was a big reason for staying put," says Guerrero, now 61.

According to the AP-NORC survey, younger baby boomers were much more likely to have gone back to school in the past five years: 30 percent of those age 50-64, compared to 19 percent of those 65 and older.

Most went for additional training because their employer required it or they wanted to learn something new or fun. Only 17 percent said they received training to start a new career.

Joe Abraham, 65, says he's sure he "dodged a few bullets along the way" during his 36-year career as an attorney at Ford Motor Co.

Now retired, he says the raises and benefits he got from Ford were not worth giving up for something else. Plus, he just liked his colleagues.

The AP-NORC Center survey was conducted March 8-27 by NORC at the University of Chicago, with funding from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation. It involved online and telephone interviews with 1,075 people aged 50 and older nationwide, most of whom are members of NORC's probability-based AmeriSpeak panel. Results from the full survey have a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 3.9 percentage points.

AmeriSpeak respondents were first selected randomly using address-based sampling methods, and later interviewed online or by phone. Sixteen respondents interviewed in Spanish were re-contacted after participating in an earlier telephone survey.

OUT OF THE VAULT

Cat-killing spree ends in arrests of three Weston men

Walla Walla County law enforcement arrested three Weston men after a 1952 shooting spree that left at least 15 cats dead and frightened a Milton-Freewater farmer.

Charges of illegal possession of a weapon and contributing to the delinquency of a minor were leveled against 29-year-old Edward Peterson, 19-year-old Ralph Mitchell and 22-year-old Benny Van Winkle, all residents of the tiny burg of Weston. The trio and a juvenile male began



RENEE STRUTHERS
Out of the vault

contingent then took their show to the outskirts of southeast

their spree outside Milton-Freewater the evening of April 2, 1952, and an unidentified farmer reported the men shot at him from their vehicle and then fled. The gun-totin' Weston

Walla Walla, where most of the cats met their untimely end.

Walla Walla deputy sheriff Leonard Krika said a car passed him as he was traveling east on Pleasant Street in Walla Walla about 1 a.m. on April 3, and he heard a gun shot. He had to fire two shots at the vehicle to get the car to stop, and found the four men inside. Van Winkle attempted to flee on foot but fell while climbing over a fence. Walla Walla city police captured Van Winkle, who

was transported to the hospital for treatment for a dislocated shoulder.

Milton-Freewater police aided in the investigation after the farmer identified the car as the one carrying the men who shot at him.

Renee Struthers is the Community Records Editor for the East Oregonian. See the complete collection of Out of the Vault columns at eovault.blogspot.com

ODDS & ENDS

30-year-old Siamese cat is named world's oldest living cat

MANSFIELD, Texas (AP) — A Siamese cat born during President Ronald Reagan's administration has been named by Guinness World Records as the world's oldest living cat.

Guinness says Scooter celebrated his 30th birthday on March 26. He lives in Mansfield, Texas.

Owner Gail Floyd attributes Scooter's longevity to staying active. She tells Guinness he keeps busy by traveling and has visited 45 of the 50 states. Some of his favorite activities include getting blow-dried after baths and snacking on chicken every other day.

Scooter isn't Guinness' oldest cat of all time, though. That mark belongs to a fellow Texas cat, which lived to be 38.

Passenger's quest for beer forced flight to divert, feds say

PORTLAND (AP) — A passenger who authorities say forced an Alaska Airlines flight to be diverted after he didn't get a beer has pleaded not guilty in Portland, Oregon, to a charge of interfering with a flight crew.

A federal indictment unsealed Tuesday says 32-year-old Luke Watts of Portland threatened to become violent if flight attendants didn't serve him a beer during a March flight from Sacramento, California, to Seattle.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Benjamin Tolko says Watts then



Gail Floyd/Guinness World Records via AP

This undated image provided by the Guinness World Records shows Scooter owned by Gail Floyd. The Siamese cat born during the Reagan administration has been named by Guinness World Records as the world's oldest.

locked himself in the bathroom and screamed and pounded on the door. He also demanded hugs from flight attendants.

Concerned about the potential for violence, the pilot decided to land in Portland.

U.S. Magistrate Judge John V. Acosta on Tuesday allowed Watts to remain free while awaiting trial.

Man locks worker in underground vault

WORCESTER, Mass.

(AP) — A Massachusetts man accused of locking a Verizon worker inside an unventilated underground vault because he was upset the worker parked on his grass has pleaded guilty to kidnapping.

Westborough resident Howard Cook Jr. entered the plea Tuesday in Worcester Superior Court.

The 73-year-old Cook was sentenced to a year of probation and ordered to complete an anger management program.

Authorities say the retired utility official locked Michael Hathaway in the vault in August 2013 by pulling out the extension ladder, locking the hatch and placing large rocks on top. The ventilation system automatically shuts off when the door is closed.

Police say Cook was upset that Hathaway parked on the grass at his business.

Hathaway used his cellphone to call police.

'Bathroom bandit' pilfers plumbing at Ohio businesses

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — Police in Ohio's capital are searching for a man who's been pilfering plumbing from stores, hospitals and restaurants.

Dubbed the Bathroom Bandit, Columbus police say he enters various local establishments, visits the men's restroom, disconnects the plumbing and leaves with the stolen parts in his backpack.

A police department spokeswoman says the businesses won't only have to replace the parts, but hire a plumber to repair the man's toilet tinkering. She said his crimes may be unusual, but they're still felonies.

The thief has struck a Kmart, several restaurants and the Mount Carmel West Hospital, all on the city's west side.

He is described as a white male between 40 and 50 years old, 5'7" to 5'11" and 180 to 200 pounds. He's been seen driving a black Honda Accord.