



**HELEN DENNIS**  
SUCCESSFUL AGING

# Project to find work for seniors

### Dear Readers:

This is one of those weeks when I come across a project I believe is relevant to successful aging. The subject is age and work.

The project is "Tapping Mature Talent," a national effort to provide career and work opportunities for those 55 and older. I am providing some training/education for the project.

Here's some background:

"The graying of America" is a commonly accepted phrase. What we don't often think about, however, is the graying of our workforce. By 2016, it is expected that 60 percent of all workers will be 55 or older.

At the same time, economic conditions are mandating that many older workers continue working, many past traditional retirement age.

For these reasons, the Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration has granted \$1 million each to 10 grantees across the country to connect older Americans to career opportunities.

Additionally, The Atlantic Philanthropies funded The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning and the Council on Competitiveness a total of \$3.6 million for technical assistance to the grantees and to disseminate effective strategies that promote career opportunities for older workers.

Unfortunately, none of the 10 projects is in California. Hopefully, what is learned from this national effort will trickle to the South Bay.

Here are a few facts about two of the projects:

- Because of Hurricane Katrina, a mismatch exists between the qualified labor supply and labor demands. About 87 percent of older workers in the region affected by

Katrina need to increase their technology skills. Many have limited access to training, need flexible work arrangements because of health problems and lack confidence to search for new positions.

The grantee, Quad Area Community Action Agency Inc., with its 25 partners, will provide technical training and skills for high-demand industries and will cultivate job opportunities.

- A profound shortage of health-care workers motivated the Baltimore County, Md., Office of Workforce Development to partner with 30 other agencies to provide training in four types of health occupations, as well as in math and language targeted to the health field. This will be accompanied by a campaign to hire older health-care workers.

Participants in the 10 projects have been laid off and are seeking employment; need to stay working beyond the traditional retirement age and require additional training; or face barriers to employment such as disabilities or a low level of English proficiency.

Here are a few points I will be discussing with the Tapping Mature Talent team, which will be supporting and advising the grantees:

**History:** For the past 40 years, we've been studying, reporting, developing models, conducting research and struggling with the barriers to employment opportunities for midlife and older adults.

The Tapping Mature Talent project is designed to move the mission forward.

**Employment:** An increasing number of older adults are working.

About two-thirds of those age 55 to 64 are in the labor force, a 10 percent increase from the mid-1980s. Among those 65 and older, about 16 percent are in the labor force, a 5 percent increase from the early '90s.

**Unemployment:** Those 55 and older have fared better than others.

The national unemployment rate in July for that age group was 6.7 percent, down from 7 percent in June. That's well under the national 9.4 percent.

That good news has a back story. The Employee Benefit Research Institute reports that among the 55-plus age group, 30 percent have saved less than \$10,000 for retirement, and 6 percent have saved \$10,000 to \$25,000.

**Employer perceptions:** Surveys from AARP and others confirm that employers rate older workers high on experience, judgment, low turnover, good attendance, punctuality and loyalty. They often are rated low on flexibility, acceptance of new technology and ability to learn new skills.

A study by AARP found that characteristics valued most about older workers were not necessarily those valued in the workplace. And characteristics rated low often are the most highly valued.

**Cost:** Cost matters. The Urban Institute found employment of older workers is high in industries where older new hires earn less than older incumbent workers. The rate is low for industries where older new hires earn more than younger new hires.

Mature workers are the most underutilized resource in our country.

Having been involved with this subject for the past 30 years, I am optimistic that this project will provide the needed training and job opportunities for mature workers, while supplying necessary skills for employers to meet their goals.

Opportunities for work in later life are part of the successful aging package. The efforts need to continue.

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