

Business

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National Employ Older Workers Week kicks off with job fair

You enter the labor force, you work until a certain age, and then you retire — or maybe you don't.

The United States demographic trend is changing. We are getting older and more people are working into their later years.

The last full week in September promotes the vital role of older workers in the workforce. This dedicated and experienced segment of the labor force contributes immensely to both private and public sectors, and in paid and volunteer positions.



Heather Boulger

Inside the Job Market

This week provides an opportunity to increase awareness and focus on the development of innovative strategies for tapping into this underutilized labor pool, which in turn can help address the potential shortage in labor sectors.

By 2024, one in four U.S. workers will be 55 or older, which is more than double the rate in 1994 when workers 55 and up accounted for just 12 percent of the workforce, according to the U.S. Department of Labor.

Older workers are a big part of the Berkshire County economy, where 43 percent of the resident population is 55 or older, compared to Massachusetts' rate of 33 percent, and this month features National Employ Older Workers Week.

People are working later in life for a number of reasons. They are healthier and have a longer life expectancy than previous generations. They are better educated, which increases



EAGLE FILE PHOTO

Job seekers crowd into the Berkshire Athenaeum in Pittsfield in 2018 for an over-50 job fair. Older workers are a big part of the Berkshire County economy, as 43 percent of the population is age 55 or older.

the likelihood of staying in the labor force. While some decide not to fully retire because they enjoy their jobs or just want to stay active and alert, others need the money. And changes to Social Security benefits and employee retirement plans, along with the need to save more for retirement have created incentives for people to keep working.

In recognition of National Employ Older Workers Week — Sept. 22-28 — the MassHire Berkshire Career Center, in collaboration with Elder Services of Berkshire County and Age Friendly Berkshires, are sponsoring the second annual 50-Plus Job Fair. More than 30 companies will be participating from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Monday at the Berkshire Athenaeum, 1 Wendell Ave., Pittsfield. The event is free and open to the public.

Why hire an older worker? To start, they have a strong work ethic, loyalty and communication skills. Although many older workers may not

have the same tech-savvy skills their younger colleagues do, they have years of experience you can't teach or replace. They have been in the workforce longer and have developed strong networks and they typically know what they want. To stay competitive in today's workforce, companies need to diversify their employees, which means making an effort to attract and retain mature workers.

Participating companies in the 50-Plus Job Fair are age-friendly and thinking about developing a multigenerational workforce. The targeted job seekers who are looking for full-time or part-time work will be able to use their age and experience to their advantage.

Older Worker Week also showcases the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP), which provides on-the-job skills training to individuals 55 or older with limited financial resources. Since its inception, SCSEP has helped

over 1 million older Americans enter the workforce. SCSEP is administered locally by Elder Services of the Berkshires and serves unemployed low-income persons who are 55 and older.

Participants are placed in paid community service positions for a maximum of 20 hours per week and receive a variety of job search and support services. The goal is to prepare individuals with the necessary skills and job training to obtain unsubsidized employment.

Workers 55 and older are employed across many types of occupations: 42 percent were in management and professional positions, followed by sales, service, production, transportation and maintenance. Some later-in-life career options can move someone from an office job into the outdoors, or perhaps a retiring teacher would prefer to give tours at a local museum.

Self-employment is an option that may offer increased flexibility and autonomy. Perhaps you enjoy your job but would prefer fewer hours; you can join the 27 percent of workers 55 and up who are employed part time.

More than ever before, older Americans are working longer, trying new things and engaging in their communities. They are taking charge, striving for wellness, focusing on independence and advocating for themselves and others. What it means to age has changed, and this week is a perfect opportunity to recognize and celebrate the many contributions that the mature worker brings to our companies.

For more information, go to MassHireBerkshireCC.com.

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