

Flexible work hours getting mixed marks

How would you like a three-day weekend — every weekend?

You may not be able to afford it. The experience of some workers who switched to the 10-hour day, four-day week, has shown they run out of money for leisure activities before they run out of weekend.

Many have found they have to adopt a simpler lifestyle in order to stay within their budget.

THAT'S ONE observation of Wayne State University economist John Owen, a specialist in the flexible work week, which has been dubbed "flexitime."

Owen, of Pleasant Ridge, recently published a book called "Working Hours: An Economic Analysis" (Lexington Books).

A professor of economics, he has been invited to appear before several Congressional committees on the value to society of flexible work-scheduling practices. Several federal departments, including Labor and Defense, have introduced flexible work schedules to obtain a variety of advantages.

"An important benefit from the government's point of view is the opportunity it offers to successfully meet affirmative-action goals," Owen says.

Women, he says, are more apt to enter the work force and stay on the job longer, under one form or another of flexitime. One obvious benefit for families with two working parents is that the system insures that one parent or the other will be home when the children leave for school and arrive back home.

"THERE IS A wide range of options under flexitime," Owen says, "but under the most liberal option, the employee simply sets his own schedule for a 40-hour week."

"Generally speaking, though, there are 'core' hours, say 10 a.m. to noon and 2-4 p.m. when all employees must be on the job. Under most systems too, the 'band width' — the earliest time of arrival and the latest departure — are established by management."

Under some schemes, the worker can opt for an occasional four-day week, making up the time missed by extending his work days.

Local governments in some cities, notably Washington, D.C., and New York, have discovered several important benefits to flexitime schedules, Owen says.

Working through local businessmen's organizations to promote flexitime and other non-standard work weeks, the local governments found flexible work schedules reduce rush-hour traffic. That reduction, in turn, may reduce pressure on government to build new roads and make other traffic-flow improvements.

There are also possible energy savings because gasoline is not wasted in stop-and-go commuter traffic tie-ups.

"THE FEDERAL government has been authorized by Congress to introduce flexitime schedules for up to two million people," Owen says. "They've been exempted from applicable labor laws to experiment with the four-day work week and other new schedules."

While data are not yet available, Owen estimates that hundreds of thousands of government employees are on some form of flexitime right now.

It has long been popular in European countries, especially Germany and Switzerland.

Business firms, too, including several large insurance companies, have introduced flexitime with good results. They find it enables them to attract women, the elderly and students who might otherwise not enter the labor market. Some estimate that as many as 6 percent of all American employees now have some type of flexible hours.

Union leaders are often skeptical of the new schedules. "Where flexitime has been introduced, it usually has been done at the suggestion of management," Owen says.

Unions may have trouble with flexitime because of contract language which calls for a shift differential for anything outside the rigid 8-5 or 9-5 schedule or for overtime after eight daily hours.

OWEN, WHO considers himself a dispassionate observer of the phenomenon rather than an advocate one way or the other, says that there are anti-inflationary effects of flexitime which should be considered.

Where employees consider it desirable, flexitime can be offered at the bargaining table in lieu of other inflationary inducements to the workers, he says.

Furthermore, improving the quality of the employee's life (reductions in commuting time, for example, or more time for family life) can benefit the employer with increased worker satisfaction and be a real plus in recruiting new personnel.

Type O blood needed now

A critical shortage of type O blood is reported by the Southeastern Michigan Red Cross Blood Services. The shortage is nationwide.

Dr. A. William Shaffer, director of Southeastern Michigan Red Cross Blood Services, considers a type O blood donor as a "special" donor "because type O blood is in greater demand and special because their blood can be used for transfusions for patients who have other blood types."

Approximately 45 percent of Americans have type O blood, 38 percent have O Rh positive and only 7 percent have O Rh negative.

Type O blood donors who have not given blood in the past eight weeks are urged to do so at the earliest convenient time.

Evening and weekend appointments are available at their nearest donor center. Regional centers are located in Detroit, Oak Park, Roseville, Livonia, Dearborn, Wyandotte and Bloomfield.

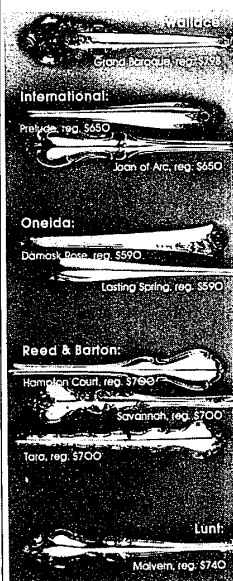
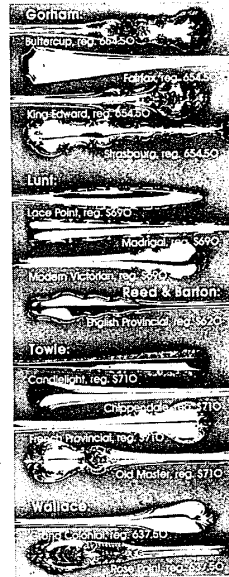
For additional information or to make an appointment to give blood, call the Red Cross at 833-4440 or the nearest donor center and ask for the type O donor coordinator.

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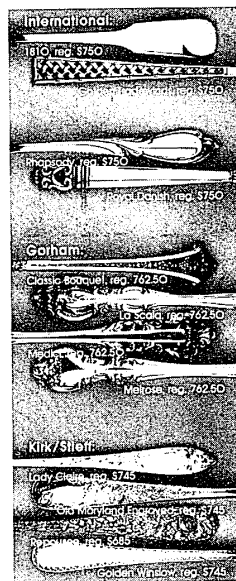
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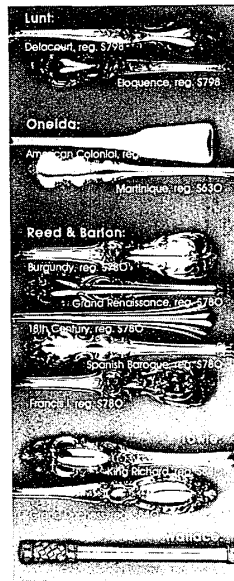
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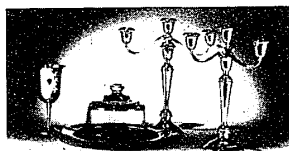
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