

Many seniors keep working to stay active

BY AILEEN WINGBLAD
SPECIAL WRITER

If the old folks aren't at home, check the work place. They just might be finishing a shift.

Senior citizens are a growing part of the today's work force, with area employers boasting of their strong work ethic, sense of responsibility and an on-the-job enthusiasm seen less in many younger employees.

And since older workers generally target employment in fields traditionally filled by teens and college-age workers — retail, food service and clerical — the competition for these jobs could well be tightening, according to various managers.

"If I had my way, I'd have all senior citizens working for me," says Sharon Reinhardt, manager of a West Bloomfield McDonald's restaurant. "These older folks are much more dependable, have a better work ethic and a better attitude (than some younger employees). They are always on time and do an excellent job."

Reinhardt employs two "mature" workers — John Popravsky, a 57-year-old resident of Baptist Manor, Farmington Hills, and West Bloomfield resident Anthony Colorito, 78.

Popravsky, who has been in the restaurant business for most of his life, is "an all-around kind of guy . . . a very big help," according to Reinhardt, who hired him three years ago.

They keep active

From restocking salad pans to filling ice trays to taking out the trash and washing dishes — which he calls a "greasy, dirty job" — Popravsky admits he complains about the work sometimes, but likes to keep active.

"The whole key is keeping yourself busy. Besides, I have to make a living somehow," says Popravsky, who uses his wages to supplement his monthly Social Security check.

Of course, he's careful to stay within the earned income limitations as required by law. Reinhardt says McDonald's flexibility in allowing employees to curtail their working hours so as not to affect their Social Security

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payments is one reason seniors find employment with the fast-food chain so attractive. "We can be very accommodating to our employees as to the number of hours worked and the days scheduled. That is very important to them," says Reinhardt.

As is the interaction with other older adults who come into McDonald's, often on a daily basis, she adds.

"We have a circle of senior citizens that come in here all the time, early in the morning, and John or Anthony can interact with them, as well as the other customers. Working keeps people active. It keeps their minds sharp."

Octogenarian Colorito, who has worked for Reinhardt for the past couple of months, agrees that it's vital to keep going as long as one can "if you want to live longer."

"If you are not active, you can get to be a couch potato . . . and your bones will start to deteriorate," says Colorito. He retired from an inspector in a local tool shop, a job that he says taught him to be on his feet all day.

At McDonald's, where he makes salads and cleans tables two or three days each week, it is that compared to the 10-hour days he worked prior to retirement. "This is a breeze."

"I've worked all my life. I sure don't care to just sit and watch



Helping hand: Senior citizen Alexander Kosidlo helps youngsters like 4-year-old Craig Berling into a shopping cart at an area Target store. Craig's mother, Tammy Berling, is at right.

TV. Of course, here you have to be fast and on your toes, but that doesn't bother me, not at all. Besides, I need to get out of my wife's hair sometimes anyway."

George Reichert, a customer service representative for the Rochester Hills Kmart, also believes that older people really need to stay as active as they can; for Reichert, 67, that means working about 30-35 hours per week.

"You have to be doing something. You need something to keep your interests up — a reason to get up in the morning. And, of course, I enjoy people; I really and truly do, so here I get the opportunity to deal with the

public," he says. In the past five years that he has been employed with Kmart — he's a retired butcher — Reichert has staffed the outdoor garden center as well as the patio department. He has also worked in receiving and price verification. Currently, he's a customer greeter.

"I'm right next to the front door — ready to be kicked out," he quips. Reichert's supervisor, Operations Assistant Manager Rosemary McCabe, is thrilled with his performance: He's the only employee she has ever evaluated to achieve a perfect score on an annual review.

Like Reinhardt, McCabe says senior citizens are often more courteous and dependable on the job than their younger counterparts. In fact, she says, Kmart prefers older workers for their customer service greeters because they can give customers "a family feeling when they come in . . . Senior citizens are quite an integral part of our work force."

"It might look like they (seniors) are just standing there handing out ads, but they do so much more than that. They are constantly on the lookout for possible shoplifters or shoddy-looking customers, keeping an eye on things. We find them to be very alert and aware," says

McCabe. "And they are out there enjoying life. That makes it all the more better."

Customer service specialist Alexander Kosidlo, a Plymouth resident who works for the Target store in Farmington Hills, sums it up with his life's philosophy, which he says comes from author Jack London.

"I would rather wear out than rust out," says the 67-year-old former auto executive. "It all has to do with the way you were brought up, your value system. I think (older workers) just happen to be more dependable and care more. That is what seems to matter."

Hills backs charging cable fee to telephone company.

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

The Farmington City Council passed a resolution March 1 opposing telephone company operation of cable-like services without paying franchise fees.

The action might be seen as symbolic. But it's part of a futuristic battle between cable and telephone companies staking a claim in the burgeoning information age.

The consumer is a bystander. Lark Samouelian of Southwestern Oakland Cable Commission asked for council's help in response to a Michigan Bell video dialtone program in Warren Consolidated Schools.

Through a phone line, students can watch instructional videos transmitted from school to their home.

The cable industry says that's unfair. Federal Communications Commission ruled video dialtone

is not a cable service. "The environment for telecommunications is heating up," said Samouelian, who is executive director of SWOCC. "If a company is going to be competitive with cable companies, which they want to be — they should be under the same jurisdiction."

City officials are concerned about franchise fees. Last year, Farmington received \$35,000 from MetroVision as part of an agreement that expires in 1997. Farmington Hills received \$230,000.

The money goes back into public access programming, city officials said.

"I think it's important, whatever form it takes, that the cities be aptly compensated for doing business in this area," said Farmington Mayor William Hartsock, who also serves on SWOCC.

Federal law prohibits telephone companies from providing cable

programming. Also, they can own no more than 5 percent in a cable franchise.

A Michigan Bell spokesman said, if allowed to compete in the cable industry, it would expect to play by the rules. He said video dialtone is separate from cable.

"We want to get into cable TV; we make no bones about it," said Dean Hovey of Michigan Bell. "Video dialtone is not it."

Video dialtone is part of the overall picture, though.

Harry Semerjian is vice president of Corporate Planning for Michigan Bell. The Farmington Hills resident envisions a system with 1,000 channels, high-definition TV and access to such things as the entire Library of Congress.

And people would have it all piped into their home on one line. The reason? The evolution of fiber optic cable.

A single fiber optic line — half the thickness of a human hair — can handle 16,000 phone circuits. "The capability of fiber optics has just been scratched," Semerjian said.

The cost of fiber optics continue to drop, Semerjian added. A subdivision could be equipped for the same amount it would take for copper cable.

Question is: Who's going to do the hook up?

MetroVision is using fiber optic cables in main trunks, Samouelian said. Michigan Bell has 250,000 miles of fiber optic installed in the state.

"It's shaping into a contest between the telephone companies and the cable companies," Semerjian said. "We need freedom from the regulations . . ."

Phone companies contend, if allowed to, they could provide more viewing alternatives and information. And, as result, open competition.

Cable companies say they provide alternatives and information. Samouelian said SWOCC is already involved in advanced learning, which involves in hooking up classrooms in different buildings by video.

Hills zoning amendment regulates satellite dishes

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

Farmington residents thinking about tuning in via satellite will need the right stuff.

The Farmington City Council passed an amendment to the zoning ordinance March 1, regulating the installation of such devices through the Planning Commission.

City Manager Frank Lauhoff estimates four residents own satellite dishes.

"I believe they're all in compliance," Lauhoff said.

Satellite dishes in single family zoned districts require a site plan under the amended ordinance.

Roof, ground and structure mounted antenna facilities must be in the rear yard area. Also, they will have to be made of mesh or rod/pole construction and not of any solid material.

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