

## Peninsula seniors face unique challenges in finding work

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San Mateo County Times

Posted: 06/14/2010 07:03:37 AM PDT  
Updated: 06/14/2010 09:28:12 AM PDT



DALY CITY — It's hard enough finding a job these days; imagine doing it with a résumé that hasn't needed updating in 30 years.

As the economy flagged during the past two years, local officials say demand went up for government social services, ranging from abuse and crisis response to affordable housing. Standing out in that group of people needing help has been a growing population of seniors competing with younger job seekers in what many call the most competitive job market in a generation.

"It's very scary. They never realized they could be put in that position," said Brenda Brown, who manages Family Service Agency of San Mateo County's Mature Worker Program, helping seniors reorient themselves, obtain needed skills and connect with other employment resources.

Many older workers — the agency's program focuses on those 55 and older — have suffered layoffs when they were on the brink of achieving livable retirement plans, Brown said. Others retired in recent years, only to find they needed to return to work when their families' finances took bad turns. Many now face a daunting struggle, having been out of the job-hunting game for decades.

"Most people in our workshops are used to doing chronological résumés, as opposed to focusing on getting their skills across," Brown said. "They come from a tradition where you do the same job for 20 years. Many don't have computer skills. You need those to work pretty much anywhere now."

After working nearly 30 years at the same bank, Martha Martinez, a Daly City mother, had squirreled away enough money to stay at home and spend time with her family for a few years after being laid off. As the economy worsened, she decided to get back into at least part-time employment, but after sending out 10 or more résumés every day for a year, she's had trouble finding work.

"They tell me I'm overqualified — for a \$10-an-hour job," Martinez said. "It's how they give you a hint they don't want you, because of your age. They can't come right out and say it."

Henri Villalovoz, director of senior employment for Council on Aging Silicon Valley, said social-services groups are rallying to get older workers — who boast a high rate of job loyalty and reliability, and often prefer part-time positions that save employers money — back in the market.

"We can get people jobs in security, because they're reliable and trustworthy," Villalovoz said. "Often, we get them in home care, because a lot want to be caregivers for other seniors. Some of the large employers, like Fry's or (Orchard Supply Hardware) or Home Depot, they might look at the experience they've had in trades, so they can be in the painting area or gardening area, wherever they have experience."

That's not all that older workers can offer, said Diane Young, who led an orientation Wednesday for the Mature Worker Program. Seniors are known for showing up to work on time and having "an old-fashioned work ethic," she said.

Young talked the crowd through several common snags in applying for work. For example, a résumé detailing decades of experience isn't as strong as one that stays concise and tells employers what relevant skills an applicant has, she said.

"An interviewer might ask if you need to work, or if you want to work," she said. "My advice is to just look them in the eye and say, 'I've had my career. I'm here because I want to work for you and share my skills, and develop some new ones.'"

Although asking a job applicant about her age is forbidden under state law, other age-related questions often pop up that create some awkwardness. Young suggested trying some dark humor.

"Let's say they ask, 'Where do you see yourself in five years?' You might just tell them, 'Well, I'd like to be alive.' Nothing wrong with putting it on the table if you feel comfortable," she said.

Wallace Stanley didn't have to be taught that particular lesson. One of the first things Stanley tells job interviewers when they sit down together is, "Don't let the gray hair fool you."

"I have to put that in there because it's the first thing they see," said Stanley, who worked 40 years as a machinist in Hayward before being laid off more than a year ago in a merger.

After losing his job, Stanley discovered the demand for machinists was almost nonexistent, so he broadened his search, landing a job at a local nonprofit, weatherizing homes for low-income and elderly people.

"I'm 64 but I'm in good shape. I can do anything the young guys can do," he said. "I was lugging refrigerators and ovens up two flights of steps, installing doors that weigh 150 pounds. I can keep up." But that job disappeared recently when state funding for the nonprofit dried up. Though he'd prepared for tough times, Stanley said he's still feeling the pressure.

"Everybody saves money for these type of times, but it doesn't go far," he said. "All I do every day is get up and go look for a job. Now, everything's on the Internet. A lot of people, like me, I'm computer-illiterate, but my wife is very good at it. She helps. I've also found a lot of resources at (the state Employment Development Department)."

Young reassured her audience at Wednesday's orientation that there can be advantages to being older.

"You are marketable," Young said. "We've developed a lot of transferable skills. We can get along with people of many different ages."

The orientation is one of many services available to seniors looking for work. The Mature Worker Program also offers a job-matching service, internships for those in low-income situations and counseling for those struggling in their search.

"We get a lot of depressed people in the program," Brown said. "Homelessness becomes an issue. We have a lot of people in the county living in their trucks, or in garages. It just amazes me. You know, you have to make sure you have a retirement plan. You don't realize how quick it'll come up on you."

Information about employment services for seniors in Santa Clara County is available at [www.coasiliconvalley.com](http://www.coasiliconvalley.com). Those interested in hiring San Mateo County seniors, or in going through a job-search orientation, can call 650-301-8440.

#### Older workers face daunting job search

Odell Williams had no idea he was training dozens of his replacements.

With a bachelor's degree from UC Berkeley, a master's earned online from the University of Phoenix and certificates in computer programming and accounting, Williams felt he'd found "a job for life," so he thought nothing of training 40 or more people who had been flown in from India.

"They sent them back to India and they laid me off," said Williams, 61. "I was escorted from the building that same day. I lost my home, and my credit got screwed up pretty badly."

Though he was able to secure a new job in IT, a profession in which he was well-trained, the same thing happened again: His job was outsourced overseas.

Now Williams lives in Daly City with an older woman from his church, acting as a caregiver and getting a break on his rent. "I was making \$10,000 a month at one point. Then they hired eight guys in India for \$300. There's nothing American workers can do to compete with that," Williams said.

He's taken a job working a graveyard security shift at a major Internet company, he said, sitting at a desk from midnight until 8 a.m.

"I'm going to have to work until I'm 71, 72, just to pay off my debts from going to college again," he said. "I get tired of hearing, 'You're overqualified.—%o"

Williams said he feels dismayed by what a college education now means in the U.S., especially when he sees the younger

people where he works.

"They do 12 or 14 hours a day. I just can't do that," he said. "But I'm going to sign up for some new classes, see if I can build some news skills and get out there again."

Yolanda Arroyo says she listened to the wrong lawyer.

After working in Mexico City for nearly two decades as an elementary school English teacher, Arroyo, now 64, was worn out working with children and took a teaching job at a Mexican university affiliated with the University of California.

"I worked there for 11 years," she said. "I should have stayed there. But some lawyers advised me: 'They're not going to give your benefits.' They said UC wasn't established legally, that they didn't have an address in Mexico."

Arroyo agreed to let a lawyer file suit for her against the UC system; in the end, she found herself out of a job. By that time, the elementary school where she'd taught had dried up as a fallback option, she said.

"It was distressing, and it was a shock," Arroyo said.

She was a widow. And her children, now living in the Bay Area, were worried and demanded she move here. Now she has a green card and lives in a Redwood City apartment owned by her soon-to-be daughter-in-law's family, and is trying to kick-start a second career.

"I am here, and I want to do something with my life," Arroyo said. "I applied to try to make it at City College of San Francisco. They have a program where they work with Kaiser, and I want to be a medical interpreter. But they will only take 10 people from 200 that were there."

In the meantime, Arroyo said she's enjoying the finer things in California life.

"I am enjoying the library here. I get a lot of books for free and turn them back and it's really fun," she said. "A lot of things people take for granted here, like taking library books home. We cannot in Mexico."

Arroyo said she doesn't know yet whether her age is an issue in finding work in the area, because she hasn't received responses to any of her applications.

"In Mexico, though, it's impossible to get a job because of my age, because they do discriminate," she said. "Although it's forbidden, you can never prove it."