

## Private Sector: Stick around, kids

### Aging of work force promises to open up many local jobs for younger workers

Tuesday, August 08, 2006

By Ron Painter

I am writing about Steve Massey's column "[Thursday Cracked These Rose-Colored Glasses](#)" in the July 30 Post-Gazette. While we can't promise to pull Steve out of his uncharacteristic funk about Pittsburgh, we can offer a point of view that may help.

In partnership with Carnegie Mellon University's Center for Economic Development, the Three Rivers Workforce Investment Board recently completed a comprehensive study, "[Managing the Changing Work force in Southwestern PA, A Closer Look at Issues Related to Our Region's Aging Work force.](#)" The study was conducted to better understand the impact of an aging work force, pinpoint the industries most likely to experience work force shortfalls and arrive at regional answers.

---

**Ron Painter** is chief executive officer of the Three Rivers Workforce Investment Board.

---

Based on study results (reported in the Post-Gazette April 6 and June 6), southwestern Pennsylvania has a "50/50" challenge; the region has 50,000 more older workers and 50,000 fewer younger workers than its average peer. In terms of the sheer numbers to fill projected job openings, there simply aren't enough younger workers in the region. As older workers retire during the next two decades, our work force will be younger but smaller unless we can rejuvenate our work force pipeline or uncover other solutions. Since the region lacks immigration and natural population growth, we will not be able to maintain our current economy without more and younger workers.

There is a positive note, however: The possibility of tens of thousands of job openings creates opportunities for younger workers and can provide more depth in the job market along with more prospects for career advancement. These opportunities can be drivers of economic growth that will attract talented young workers to the region.

We can't predict if there will be a labor shortage in 20 years based on today's demographics, but we can take a closer look at the challenges and choices that the region may face. We plan to work with many partner organizations dealing with this issue -- including the Institute of Politics at Pitt -- and will begin with:

- Industry leaders and associations in sectors that are most likely to be impacted by the average age of their work force, precipitating a work force shortage -- to pinpoint the projected shortfalls and remedies;
- Employers -- to raise awareness of the aging issue. Study findings indicated a lack of awareness and action among the majority of employers. As a region, we need to better understand the skills needed most by employers, find efficient and effective ways to help workers acquire these skills, and thereby help build a strong competitive position for employers and the larger region;
- Regional educators, work force professionals and learning providers -- to make certain that they are prepared to help the work force succeed in attaining the skills the region will need most, and;
- Human resources experts -- to promote effective and innovative human resources practices, through the People Do Matter award program, for example, and others to be developed. These will help foster the practices in businesses that will help attract and keep talent.

The bottom line is that although the aging issue doesn't affect all industries or all companies, employers need to look internally and plan for the transition. The fact that we have large numbers of workers who will be exiting the labor force creates opportunities for young people and can encourage them to stay in Pittsburgh or to consider it as a destination from other regions.

Pittsburgh needs to be ready and enthusiastic about embracing new peoples, different cultures and different beliefs. Are we ready for the challenge?