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The aging work force is growing

By CATHY BROWNFIELD/Family Recovery Center

"I quit my job. I just can't juggle job and family anymore. I'm stressed to the max all of the time. I don't have enough hours in my day. I just can't do this any more."

"You're at an age that finding another job will be difficult," Her mother advised. What was Mom talking about? Carla was only 45 years old!

"After age 35, it's hard to find a job," her mother advised. "And you're well past that age."

By 2012, reports AARP, nearly 20 percent of the total U.S. work force will be age 55 or older. As the proportion of younger workers continues to decline, attracting and retaining the mature, experienced worker will become increasingly critical for employers who seek to retain a competitive edge in today's marketplace.

The Agency on Aging advises that older Americans are responsible, trained and ready to work. They are talented, experienced and qualified for the jobs.

The U.S. Senate, Special Subcommittee on Aging, reported in early 2003 that the world population is slowing, with some decline already noted. At that time, there were seven general implications for the work force:

- o Domestic supplies of labor will decline.
- o Aging will "double whammy" the high-skilled worker supply.
- o The global "Battle for Talent" will intensify.
- o Indigenous supply of low-skilled workers will decrease.

- o Manufacturing firms locate where there are less labor shortages.
- o Globalization of human resources.
- o Efforts to substitute capital and technology for labor.

The report offers the Aging/Work force Equation: global aging + country/region factors + policy levers + wildcards = work force outcomes.

Since 1900, life expectancy has increased from 47 years to 77 years, reports Microsoft.

"As people live longer, they also are likely to experience more age-related changes in their vision, hearing and dexterity, which can affect their capacity to use and interact with computing devices and environments."

People are living longer. With that higher life expectancy and improved medical care, they need to work longer. Many are delaying retirement and retirees are reentering the work force for a variety of reasons including changes in savings, government policies, economy, structure of pension plans. By 2012 a shortfall of 7.4 million baccalaureate degrees is expected, which will negatively impact economic growth.

Older workers need to keep current on technology and computer skills. Workers acquire skills as they are needed, dispelling the myth that older people can't learn new skills. They can, and do.

The work force will find more older workers over the next decade, reports Glenn D. Daviet, CSP, ARM, CPCU, author of the "Safety and Health Implications of an Aging Work force" report. They experience fewer injuries and illnesses, but higher severity and fatality rates. Many of the safety and health considerations of older workers are well known and can be addressed through workplace and job modifications. Proper matching of workers to work is important to safe employment.

The experience of older workers often compensates for age-related physical and cognitive limitations.

The needed work place modifications don't have to be expensive and can benefit everyone. Wellness, exercise and disease management programs can help older workers offset some of the adverse effects of aging and develop successful coping strategies, Daviet said.

A new survey predicts that the number of Americans age 50 or older who are

addicted to alcohol or other drugs will double by 2020, advises Join Together, a project of Boston University.

"'Late onset' addiction problems are often related to health problems and emotional trauma associated with aging. Alcohol is the leading drug of abuse among older Americans, followed by prescription drugs.

A study of emergency room admissions for drug-related problems found that a significant percentage involved patients over age 50.

"We are beginning to see an increase in heroin and cocaine addiction at the front-end of the baby boom wave," said Carol Colleran of the Hanley Center, the author of *Aging and Addiction*.

"The increase is slight yet, but it begs the question as to whether that figure is going to increase dramatically if the baby boomers revert back in retirement to the drugs they tended to use in their college years."

Family Recovery Center promotes healthy individuals, families and communities for life. For more information about this topic and our education, prevention and treatment programs, contact us at 964 N. Market St., Lisbon; phone, 330-424-1468 or e-mail, info@familyrecovery.org. FRC is funded in part by Columbiana County Job and Family Services.