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# Boomers change attitudes about retirement

Businesses in Sheridan County are struggling to find workers.

Work force shortage is one of the three top economic development challenges. The other two are lack of child care and shortage of affordable housing.

County unemployment is under 3 percent, and businesses that responded to a survey last summer reported 400 available jobs with no applicants.

Meanwhile, 22 percent of Sheridan County residents are 60 years or older, many of them retired.

Traditionally, these individuals have not been considered as part of the employment pool. But tradition is being overturned as the nation's baby boomers join the 60-and-older set.

According to a recent article in the Wall Street Journal, the aging boomers are not only better educated with higher incomes than the generation that preceded them, but they have longer life expectancies than the preceding generation.

And, as a group, they expect to delay retirement longer than their parents or grandparents.

For some, it's a necessity. Fewer companies offer health insurance to retirees, and numbers of private pension plans have failed.

But for others, it's a choice. A government survey indicates that most U.S.

workers nearing retirement age want to gradually reduce their workload rather than abruptly stop.

For Sheridan County, that translates to a sizable pool of potential workers. These are people who not only want to work, but who have established track records of experience, dependability and a strong work ethic.

The issue is connecting these people who want to work with employers who want to hire them.

Forward Sheridan created a Workforce Recruitment committee to work on Sheridan County's work force shortage. One strategy is to identify the need to bring older workers back into the work force.

To do this, several focus groups are being set up — one will involve retirees and those nearing the traditional retirement age. This group will help identify their work experience, needs and preferences and what factors are necessary to recruit them.

Another set of focus groups will gather employers that are interested in hiring old-

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er workers to discuss their expectations and to identify what they need to learn and have in place to manage an older work force.

Several strategies to connect these two groups have been discussed. They include job fairs targeting older workers and quarter-

ly roundtable meetings for employers focusing on recruiting and employing older workers.

Part of this effort will involve marketing the opportunities for older workers to embark on second or third careers and providing training programs to assist them in retooling for new jobs.

Nationwide, many individuals are already doing this on their own, leaving jobs they've held for years and returning to colleges or technical schools to learn new trades.

Bringing older workers back into the work force is a win-win situation for all involved. The employer is able to fill positions needed for business, and the older worker continues to be active and engaged in the community.

A multigenerational work force is ideal!

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, more than 37 million Americans are now 65 or older, and that number is expected to nearly double by 2030.

This demographic dominance means older workers are needed to maintain an adequate work force. This necessity, along with the baby boomers' need and/or desire to remain in the work force past the traditional retirement age, makes it critical to embrace and make good use of their knowledge and experience.

If you are retired, or will retire soon, and are interested in being a part of our focus group, please call Philippe or Liz at Forward Sheridan, 673-8004.

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*"A Community Affair" is a weekly column from citizens who support Forward Sheridan, a professional business organization of invested partners whose purpose is to develop and maintain a sound economy in Sheridan County. Philippe Chino is president/CEO of Forward Sheridan.*