

Tallahassee.com

Age an asset for some job seekers

Seniors bring experience to the table in today's job market

By Ashley Ames • DEMOCRAT STAFF WRITER
Published: March 06, 2011 2:00AM

Gerry Waterman isn't exactly where he thought he would be at age 62. Far from being retired, he has more in common with graduating college seniors than senior citizens.

Waterman is looking for a job. And, so far, he's not having a whole lot of success.

"It's kind of nerve-wracking, waiting for telephone calls," said Waterman, who is experiencing unemployment for the first time. "I keep hoping for a phone call or an interview."

In January, Waterman was let go from his job as a safety consultant for construction sites due to the downturn in the economy.

Since then, his wife, Sherry, 60, has supported them with her job at the Florida Department of Law Enforcement crime lab processing paperwork. Although she originally accepted the job as a way to keep occupied and bring in some extra money, it has now become the couple's sole source of income. With uncertain finances and a mortgage payoff still eight to nine years away, retirement isn't something either is planning any time soon.

"I think (retirement) is something for people with money stashed away," Sherry laughed. "It's something you think about after the house is paid for."

Waterman certainly isn't alone in his quest for a job.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, of the 139.3 million Americans now employed, 28.3 million are 55 and older.

Florida has 4.45 million residents age 60 or older. The 2010 average of the 55 and older Florida labor force — which includes employed and unemployed residents — was 1,922,000.

Kitte Carter, the president of Management Recruiters Inc. of Tallahassee, said age really isn't a factor in

the companies she deals with. In fact, she said that sometimes an older worker will actually have an advantage.

"Older workers have a lot of life experience, and a lot to bring to the table," she said, adding that many had the flexibility in their lives to dedicate themselves to a job opportunity.

The advantage really comes into play, however, with job applicants who do not have a college degree. Look at it from a company's perspective, Carter said.

"If you are an employer, and you are going to take someone without a college degree," she said, "would you rather take a 26-year-old without a degree, or a 55-year-old with a great track record and proven work ethic?"

Carter also urged seniors to be flexible and be willing to take a contracted job or volunteer for a month to show the company what they can do.

Within her own company, which is currently hiring, age hasn't played into job performance at all.

"One of my top recruiters is 66, 67," Carter said, "and I have another really great one in their early 30s. Age doesn't have much to do with my business, just your attitude and your work ethic."

Under the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967, age discrimination is forbidden against people who are 40 or older. The act makes it illegal to discriminate when it comes to any aspect of employment, including hiring, firing and benefits,

Advertisement

USA TODAY
AutoPilot 
The new travel app for iPhone® and iPod touch®
Presented by: 
SEE HOW IT WORKS >>

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™

Tallahassee.com

according to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission website.

The act also states, however, that an employer favoring an older worker over a younger one is not illegal, even if both are over 40.

There are national systems in place to assist seniors who need help finding a job, specifically the Senior Community Service Employment Program. This federally funded program is authorized by the Older Americans Act of 1965 and provides subsidized, service-based training for individuals 55 and older who are unemployed and have poor employment prospects.

Those individuals are then placed at various nonprofit and community service facilities to help them cross the bridge into the work force. They are paid through funding from the program.

The Tallahassee Senior Center is one of the places SCSEP participants work locally.

"We at any one time have two or three seniors who are funded by the SCSEP," said Sheila Salyer, senior services manager for the city of Tallahassee. "It's a win-win situation. It helps us, giving us additional staff, and it helps that senior. That is definitely a benefit to local seniors."

Ken Brummel-Smith, chair of the department of geriatrics at the Florida State University College of Medicine, said that essentially, you are only as old as you feel.

"You can't have an expectation based on age," Brummel-Smith said. With regard to health issues that come up later in life, everyone is different, so the way health problems affect people is different.

In the work place, it is not so much a person's disability that is the issue, he said. "It's can they do the job."

In fact, he said, having a job can actually be quite beneficial to seniors.

"We know for certain that staying healthy depends on staying active physically, mentally and socially, and for many people, work does that," he added.

This was true for Scott Coddington, who, after retiring in 2006 at age 60, found himself back at work in 2008. The reasons were not monetary,

however. He just liked working.

Coddington is working as a student success specialist at the Tallahassee Community College-run Florida Public Safety Institute. After 30 years in education before he retired, Coddington said he is happy to be back in the saddle.

Advertisement

USA TODAY
AutoPilot 
 The new travel app for iPhone® and iPod touch®
 Presented by: 
SEE HOW IT WORKS >>

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™