

# Work still beckons for some seniors

Sean Dobbin, Rochester (N.Y.) Democrat and Chronicle | 2:23 p.m. EDT March 19, 2013

*Either by choice or out of necessity, many over 65 are still working.*



(Photo: Carlos Ortiz, Rochester (N.Y.) Democrat and Chronicle)

ROCHESTER, N.Y. — A myriad of rising costs — health care, gas, their children's educations — [have sent more seniors back to the workplace](http://www.democratandchronicle.com/article/20130318/NEWS01/303180049/senior-citizens-older-workers-retirement-wegmans) (<http://www.democratandchronicle.com/article/20130318/NEWS01/303180049/senior-citizens-older-workers-retirement-wegmans>) than any time in the last half-century.

In 2010, 16.1% of Americans ages 65 and older were still working, up from 12.1% in 1990, according to recently released census data. And many more are continuing to look for part- or full-time jobs to supplement fixed incomes that aren't going as far as they expected.

"A lot of people that have retired are coming back — I know we've got several (clients) in their 60s that are still working," said Steve Neelin, CEO of Quality Recruiting, a Rochester, N.Y.-based company. "They're not high-paying jobs. The reason they're working is more out of necessity."

## Rising costs

Hank Markowitz, 78, said he could get by without his part-time job at Wegmans where he's a cashier, but the extra income is helping him stave off various increases in his cost of living.

"You can make ends meet, but I didn't really want to change my lifestyle," said Markowitz, of Rochester, who has been working at Wegmans for nine years. "I can live without (the income), but it's a lot more fun with it."

This attitude is prevalent among most working seniors. Obviously, no one wants to see a meaningful decline in their standard of living once they retire, said George Conboy, president of Brighton Securities, a financial services company.

But even those who planned for a leaner lifestyle are having trouble accounting for a steady onslaught of rising costs. Health care is always front and center in the conversation, Conboy said.

"There is not a discussion with anybody nearing retirement that doesn't include 'How are you going to pay for health care?' " he said. "Twenty years ago, everyone had employer-provided health care and it was almost an afterthought."

The recent recession, which sent the stock market into a tailspin, doubled down on retiree hardships.

Those who have remained in the workforce over the last five years and were able to leave their savings untouched managed to recover what they'd lost in the stock market; the Dow Jones industrial average just two weeks ago surpassed its peak from five years earlier.

But those relying on fixed incomes, including many who took early retirements, had to continue withdrawing money to support themselves and weren't able to fully benefit from the market's eventual rebound.

Additionally, many of those entering retirement age were among the generation that began waiting until later in life to start families. As those parents creep toward their golden years, their children aren't as far along in their own lives as they were in generations past.

"Once these kids finish college, they don't have a very good job," said Amit Batabyal, professor of economics at Rochester Institute of Technology. "Many of these kids have loans to pay back which they cannot pay themselves. So from the standpoint of the parents, this means they have to increase their income to sustain not just themselves but maintain their children as well."

The multitude of struggles has pushed many back in to the workforce.

But the going hasn't been easy, as the economic downturn caused many older workers to feel they were being discriminated against. Between 1997 and 2007, there was an average of 17,059 age discrimination claims filed annually to the [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission \(http://www.eeoc.gov/\)](http://www.eeoc.gov/). From 2008 to 2012, annual claims jumped to an average of 23,389.

Some older job seekers have also perceived companies as hesitant to hire someone already in their 60s, positing that companies may be reluctant to spend money to train an older worker when that person could retire after just a few years.

### **Loyal workers**

But while hiring costs can be significant, many companies are finding that older workers are actually more likely than their younger counterparts to stay loyal. Workers between the ages of 25 and 34 only stay on with an employer for an average of 3.2 years, according to 2012 data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

"Younger workers today are much more likely to move around to achieve their career goals," said Laurie Zaucha, vice president of human resources and organizational development for Paychex Inc.

"The average tenure of the over-65 group (at Paychex) is 14 years with the company, while the average overall is 7 years."

As the population continues to age, people will continue to work longer than they have in the past, and the way people save for retirement will change, said Batabyal, who also said that the retirement age surrounding benefit programs such as Social Security and Medicare may be raised in the future.

But the larger pool of older workers will benefit companies such as Paychex, said Zaucha, as businesses can pick and choose from the best employees available, regardless of their age. Older workers, she said, bring a professional maturity that comes alongside their years of experience.

Paul Ford began working at Paychex when he was 67 years old. He's now 84, and still works part time at the company as a contract analyst. He's one of about 170 Paychex workers who are over the age of 65 — a total that represents about 1.5 percent of the company's workforce.

"I certainly think that a person, if they're able to, they're better off working than not working," said Ford, a Gates, N.Y., resident.

### **By the numbers**

- 12.1 percent, Americans aged 65 or older that were working in 1990.
- 16.1 percent, Americans aged 65 or older that were working in 2010.
- 13.7 percent, Americans aged 18 to 64 who are impoverished.
- 8.7 percent, Americans aged 65 and older who are impoverished.