

Poll: Half of older workers delay retirement plans

By Matt Sedensky. Associated Press

CHICAGO — Stung by a recession that sapped investments and home values, but expressing widespread job satisfaction, older Americans appear to have accepted the reality of a retirement that comes later in life and no longer represents a complete exit from the workforce.

Some 82 percent of working Americans over 50 said it is at least somewhat likely they will work for pay in retirement, according to a poll released yesterday by the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

The survey found that 47 percent of working respondents expect to retire later than they had thought — on average, at about 66, or nearly three years later than their estimate when they were 40.

Men, racial minorities, parents of minor children, those earning less than \$50,000 a year and those without health insurance were more likely to put off their plans.

“Many people had experienced a big downward movement in their 401(k) plans, so they’re trying to make up for that period of time when they lost money,” said Olivia Mitchell, a retirement expert who teaches at the University of Pennsylvania.

About three-quarters of working respondents said they have given their retirement years some or a great deal of thought. When considering factors that are very or extremely important in their retirement decisions, 78 percent cited financial needs, 75 percent said health, 68 percent their ability to do their job and 67 percent said their need for employer benefits such as health insurance.

Graphic designer Tom Sadowski, 65, of Sterling, Va., had expected to retire this year, but the recession caused his business to fail and his savings to take a hit. With four teenage daughters, he knew he had to put off retirement.

“At this age, my dad had already been retired 10 years and moved to Florida,” he said. “Times are different now for most people.”

Sadowski now plans to retire in about five years, but even then, he expects to do some work for pay. He notes that some of his friends without children have begun to retire, but he tries not to dwell on his shifted plans.

“For a moment, maybe, I have a twinge of, ‘I wish that were me,’ ” he said.

The shift in retirement expectations coincides with a growing trend of later-life work. Labor-force participation of seniors fell for a half-century after the advent of Social Security but began picking up in the late 1990s. Older adults are now the fastest-growing segment of the U.S. workforce; people 55 and up are forecast to make up one-fourth of the civilian labor force by 2020.

Among those who retired, 4 percent are looking for a job and 11 percent are working again.