

## Many Companies Not Preparing for Boomer Retirements

“Now or never” may be the unofficial motto of employers trying to capture the intellectual capital of Baby Boomers nearing retirement age. In fact, approximately 20% of the nation’s workforce will be over age 55 by 2010, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

In a two-part study entitled *Gray Matters: Opportunities & Challenges of Indiana’s Aging Workforce*, the Center for Aging & Community (CAC) at the University of Indianapolis contends that widespread retirement of aging workers from a host of professions may spur a national skills shortage.

BizVoice® featured the first phase in its September/October 2005 issue. It identified professions that were particularly vulnerable to skills shortages such as teachers (elementary through postsecondary); nurses; and maintenance, repair and electrical workers.

The final phase, published earlier this year, outlines four themes based on survey feedback from more than 400 Hoosier businesses and organizations with at least 50 employees. Topics included their perceptions of older workers (defined as age 50 and above) and to what degree they were modifying internal policies to accommodate them.

Among key findings: Although many employers acknowledge that their companies lose human capital when individuals retire, most are not proactively preserving it. Some organizations, appear unconcerned about the demographic shift. In addition, responses



The Center for Aging & Community recommends employers routinely provide ongoing training to all workers.

revealed a discrepancy between how older and younger managers view issues related to older workers.

“If organizations are thinking about these issues, most of their strategies are geared toward replacing rather than retaining older workers,” comments Ellen Miller, CAC executive director.

“Certainly, replacing is part of the solution, but retaining and retraining are also critical.”

She declares, “We were pleased to find that the qualities employers rated as most important are traits associated with older workers (including a commitment to quality work and experience in the job or industry).”

### Making it a priority

Known for its trauma care, St. Mary’s Medical Center in Evansville was named one of the top 50 employers for workers over 50 by AARP in 2006. In addition to a generous retirement plan, the hospital offers older workers a variety of volunteer opportunities and an employee discount at the hospital’s on-site pharmacy.

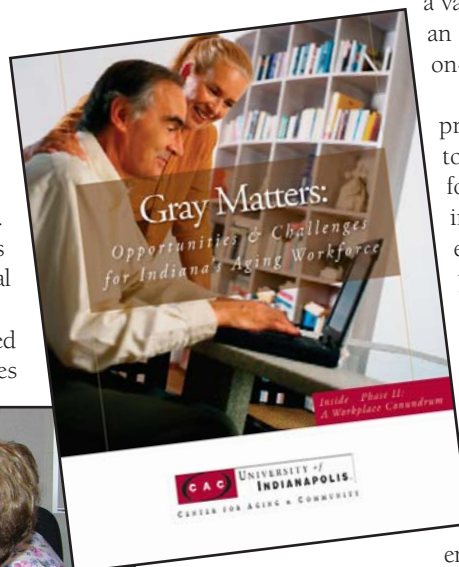
“When we make changes to processes in our clinical areas, we try to make them as friendly as possible for the caregiver, which is especially important for the older worker,” emphasizes Dorothy Gehlhausen, pension specialist. “We instituted a device called a Vocera (for instance) that enables caregivers to communicate with each other without having to page someone or use a phone. They wear it around their neck and it minimizes movement up and down the hall.”

Moreover, St. Mary’s helps employees enhance their technology skills by providing onsite computer training for Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint and other software programs.

When considering Indiana’s progress since the CAC launched its *Gray Matters* study two years ago, Miller asserts, “We may not have moved completely from awareness to action, but we’re getting closer. I think many employers are starting to do age audits and workforce planning, and thinking about it at least, if not doing something about it. But based on the results of our survey, we could be doing a lot better.”



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#### INFORMATION LINK

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