



## Never too old to work Aug 15 2007 10:33 AM

Stamford, Connecticut - At 92, Pete Perillo still has a workday routine. He says a prayer and then heads off in uniform to guard the city courthouse.

"In the morning, I talk to St Anthony and I come in," Perillo said. "I come in every day ... These people, they keep me alive."

Perillo works as a judicial marshal in Stamford Superior Court's civil division. He carries no gun.

He is one of a growing number of people for whom retirement age has lost its meaning. They are staying on the job longer and longer past that point - some for personal satisfaction, others out of necessity.

Some are even working away into their 90s and beyond: In Maryland, Grace Wiles, 97, works about 25 hours per week at a shoe repair store. In Nebraska, 98-year-old Sally Gordon is the legislature's assistant sergeant at arms.

They are all younger than Waldo McBurney, a 104-year-old beekeeper from Kansas who was recently declared America's oldest worker.

About 6.4% of Americans 75 or older, or slightly more than 1 million, were working last year. That is up from 4.7%, or 634 000, a decade earlier, according to the US Department of Labour.

About 3.4% of Americans 80 or older, or 318,000, were in the work force last year, up from 2.7 percent or 188,000 a decade earlier, officials said.

"For the first time in history, four generations are working together," said Melanie Holmes, vice president of corporate affairs for Manpower Inc., an employment services company.

With the first wave of Baby Boomers reaching the traditional retirement age, Manpower has urged companies to start thinking about ways to retain and recruit older workers, through flexible scheduling for example. This will help them fill positions as the labor pool shrinks.

According to Holmes, companies need to extend their diversity training to include age as well as race and gender. Older workers often bring experience and a strong work ethic, but may have a different style of work: They may be better at face-to-face contact than electronic communications, and may adhere more strictly to company rules, Manpower officials said.

Some companies are reluctant to hire older workers. A survey last year by Manpower found that 24 percent of employers viewed expectations for higher salary or stature as one of the top roadblocks to hiring older workers, while 21 percent cited health care costs.

Still, after decades of decline, the number of workers 55 and older began to rise about a decade ago and that trend has accelerated since 2000, labor officials said.

Experts cite several factors for the growth, including people living longer and the Senior Citizens Freedom to Work Act in 2000, which allowed workers 65 through 69 to earn as much money as they want without losing Social Security benefits. Other reasons include the gradual increase in the age for



receiving Social Security benefits to 67 and a decline in traditional pensions and retiree health benefits.

The number of older workers is likely to continue to rise as Americans live longer and are unable to make ends meet on Social Security state pensions and savings in company-sponsored retirement plans, said Alicia Munnell, director of the Center for Retirement Research at Boston College.

"It's a concern to me they will end up having to," Munnell said.

Irene Olsen, 95, works 20 hours a week at a senior center in Milford, Connecticut, to pay for rising taxes and utilities.

Otherwise, she says, she could not stay in her house.

Olsen, who used to run a hat shop in Milford, now oversees the travel department at the senior center. She spoke out recently against a property revaluation.

"They doubled the value of my house, which doubles my taxes," Olsen said. "That's why I work. I can't live on my Social Security and own a house."

Olsen, whose husband died about 20 years ago, drives to work but worries she will lose her license because of her age if she has an accident. But she doesn't mind working and goes on the trips she coordinates.

"It seems normal to me," she said. "I've worked all my life."

She is not out of place at the senior center. The tap dance instructor is 90, while, at 95, Art White directs the band and runs the bowling league.

"I found him in his office standing on a stool fixing something," said Mary Steinmetz, the center's program director. "He doesn't know why we buy new things when things can be fixed. He always thinks there's a little more life left in everything."

White was not available to talk. He was out of town line dancing.

Steinmetz says the older workers are part of a generation that believes in hard work. They also want to remain independent, especially White, a retired engineer.

"He's just a real Yankee, fiercely independent, hard working," Steinmetz said. "Doesn't know why the weather keeps anyone from doing anything."

Gordon, the assistant sergeant at arms in Nebraska, said she works both because she enjoys it and because it pay the bills.

"I like to meet the public," she said. "My house needs a lot of work. Everything is expensive. Medication is out of sight. I don't want to rely on anyone else."

Perillo, who has worked as a marshal since 1978, has been talking about retiring for the past decade.

"I don't think he ever will," said chief marshal Victor Corley.