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Local business

## Gen-Xers can't keep up

*Demographers see gap in years ahead between jobs, workers*

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A declining birthrate colliding with a growing need for workers could bring a supply-demand logjam in coming years for Greater Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky employers.

The recipe for such a work force disaster seems clear: not enough experienced workers to fill open jobs in technology, services and other industries because too many baby boomers have retired at the same time a declining birth rate resulted in not enough people being born to take on those jobs.

A labor market report from the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services is succinct. The Ohio economy will grow by 7 percent, or 425,000 new jobs, between 2004 to 2014. At the same time, about 800,000 Ohio baby boomers will be leaving the work force.

"The biggest challenge for Ohio's employers will be finding skilled, well-trained workers," labor market analysts concluded.

A similar scenario is apparently playing out in Kentucky, where about 250,000 workers of the commonwealth's 1.8 million labor force are older than 55 and will likely retire in the years to come.

But whether they leave the work force is an open question, said Carlos Cracraft, Kentucky chief labor market analyst. Semi-retirement is a moving target for most seniors.

"Available labor is a difficult thing to measure because there's so much personal decision involved," he said. "You might be available for a \$25 an hour job five minutes from where you work. Another employer with a job a half hour away, and the person might not be interested."

Ed Reilly, chief executive of the American Management Association, a global organization that tracks business trends and offers training to 4,000 companies around the world, projected that 17 million baby boomers will be leaving the work force in the years to come.

The result is inevitable, he contended.

"There will be a talent shortage," he said. "The full wave hasn't hit yet."

Some major companies, such as Cincinnati-based Federated Department Stores, are already doing something about it. Federated, parent of Macy's, has created enhanced Internet-based job boards, formed strategies to track the demographics of its work force and launched aggressive recruitment efforts on college campuses.



The Enquirer/Carrie Cochran

**Jerry Burck, founder of Lucette Crane Systems Inc. in Oakley hired Vivian Kist, senior executive for Baker & Daboll, an executive coaching firm based in Mason, to help him retain employees. "Nothing around the corner of the future is ever as we expect it to be," he says.**

"When a lot of talented young people think about retail, they tend to think about people in stores," said Jim Sluzewski, vice president for corporate communications and external affairs. "But a company the size of Federated needs lawyers, people in marketing, store planning, architecture, construction, all the way down the line."

The possibility of a labor shortage is more a concern than an actual worry for Jerry Burck, 54, of Anderson Township, founder and president of Lucette Crane Systems Inc., an Oakley firm that had \$2.5 million in revenues in 2006.

The company, which manufactures electric overhead cranes for industrial uses, employs 10, and Burck wants to hold onto them as long as he can.

Companies that do the best job of retaining employees will be the ones to thrive in the years to come, he believes.

So he hired Vivian Kist, chief learning officer and senior executive for Baker & Daboll, an executive coaching firm based in Mason.

Kist, of Lawrenceburg, offered Burck insight that might benefit others facing a similar challenge with the work force:

Get real about your leadership style and use confidential methods to know others' perceptions of you as a leader.

Practice the "Platinum Rule" — treat others as they need to be treated.

Evaluate the results. "Business behaviors and

their impact can be measured," Kist said.

"I want to learn how to create an environment where people will have the opportunity to be successful," Burck concluded. "Nothing around the corner of the future is ever as we expect it to be. I wouldn't say I'm worried, but I'm paying attention."

Scott Silver, 52, a Batesville resident who is vice president of human resources for Reading-based Standard Textile, is cautiously optimistic that plenty of companies will survive the trend and many will even thrive. Why?

Because growth is a salve that can solve a lot of problems for companies, he said, and Standard Textile has been growing.

Silver suggests that other companies worried about finding enough workers start now with intense recruiting

But Linda Gravett, senior partner at Gravett and Associates, an Anderson Township-based organization development consulting firm and author of "Bridging the Generation Gap" (Career Press; 2007), agreed with Silver that the challenge for companies will not necessarily be about finding enough people.

"What we are experiencing is a skills crisis," she said. "We don't have enough people with the right skills to compete on a global basis.

"There are 77 million baby boomers. There aren't enough Gen-Xers out there — unless companies expect to eliminate half their positions."