

Wisconsin Park & Recreation Association

Career Center Tips: **Graduates:** 7 Ways to Take Advantage Of Boomer Vacancies



Park and Recreation Boomers retiring leads to more opportunities for college graduates

Amidst chatter of baby boomers delaying retirement is talk of a different nature. Not about when boomers are retiring, but how certain industries and the rest of the work force will be affected when they do.

Baby boomers, born between 1946 and 1964, currently make up at least one-third of our nation's work force, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. In the next 10 years, the number of workers age 55 and older is expected to increase by 50 percent. As the age of the work force increases, the more boomers will leave their jobs, creating a need for younger workers to fill their positions.

Though many boomers plan to extend their stay in the work force, even those retiring will continue working after they do. A survey by The Associated Press found that 66 percent of boomers expect to work for pay after retiring; 43 percent will do so because they want to stay busy; 27 percent say they'll keep working to make ends meet; and an additional 19 percent will work so they can afford "extras."

Although they're doing it slowly, boomers *are* leaving the job market, in some industries more than others. For example, parks, recreation, therapeutic recreation, teaching and government saw waves of hiring in the 1960s and '70s and many of these workers are retiring now. Other industries, like utilities, and oil and gas, have older workers with long tenures – therefore, they're likely to exit the work force sooner.

What this means for job seekers

Although some boomers are staying on the job longer than their forerunners, the fact is that older workers have to retire sometime. When they do, many jobs will be open, especially for younger people. Within the Wisconsin Park & Recreation Association, it is estimated that over 400 professionals will be retiring within the next 10 years!

WPRA doesn't think boomers delaying retirement will affect hiring for several reasons. First, there's a need for younger employees to meet a growing consumer market of their generation. Additionally, younger workers have some skills most boomers do not possess. For example, the ability to navigate and develop content for the Internet, like Web 2.0 and developing podcasts or video.

College grads grew up with the latest technologies. Cell phones, instant messaging, iPod, GPS, online communications, Internet gaming. Demand for such skills is increasing, not decreasing, even in the parks and recreation industry.

Want to take advantage of these job opportunities? Here are four tips from WPRA to give you an edge over other job applicants:

1. **Know who's getting snatched up quickly.** Top bachelor's degrees in demand within the park and recreation industry remain at the municipal and county levels. However, Wisconsin has seen a high demand in towns and villages that have recently developed park and recreation departments, or who have a long-standing history of providing these services.
2. **Exploit your tech expertise.** You have at least one thing in your favor that trumps the experience of senior employees. You are technologically light years ahead of your boomer counterparts. Remind employers that you learned computer skills even before your ABCs. The park and recreation industry has a huge demand for computer savvy professionals in park and shelter reservations, golf registrations, monitoring of capital improvements, and recreation registration programming
3. **Give them what they want.** When asked to name the attributes they look for in college grads, employers affiliated with the National Recreation and Park Association ranked these in the top seven: communication skills, strong work ethic, teamwork skills, initiative, problem-solving skills, analytical skills and flexibility/adaptability.
4. **Don't undersell yourself.** A majority of community park and recreation agencies offer new hires medical insurance, life insurance, a 401(k) retirement plan, dental insurance, annual salary increases and employee assistance counseling. Translation: They need you.