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Registered nurse Florence Polk, 71, tends to baby Nicole Samantha of Chandler in the neonatal intensive-care unit at Scottsdale Healthcare Shea hospital. Polk works three shifts a week.

## Ariz. hopes baby boomers remain in workforce longer

By Connie Midey  
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Imagine walking into your neighborhood grocery, hospital or government office and finding that a quarter of its workforce is missing.

Census figures suggest the threat is real, and Arizona is taking steps to avoid it. By 2020, one in four Arizonans is expected to be older than 60, says Melanie Starns, Gov. Janet Napolitano's policy adviser on aging. More than 35 percent of Yavapai County residents already are in that age group.

This year, the oldest boomers turn 62 and become eligible for early Social Security benefits. The thought of millions of boomers tak-

### Coming Thursday

Retire early or keep working? Baby boomers talk about their decision. **Arizona Living**

ing their early-retirement benefits is causing concern about the stability of Social Security and Medicare.

"We know not everybody is going to up and retire all at once," Starns said, "and we will have younger workers coming in. But if you look at all the demographics, there just won't be enough people to fill all the jobs that could be vacant."

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# Ariz. hopes boomers remain in workforce

## BOOMERS

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Add that possibility to existing shortages of workers in health-care and other fields, she said, and "there could be some pretty significant problems in society."

### Workforce initiative

Arizona, which launched its Mature Workforce Initiative in 2005 to avert such a crisis, was one of five states lauded last month for efforts to engage people 50 and older in meaningful jobs and community service.

The San Francisco-based Civic Ventures think tank also cited California, Maryland, New York and Massachusetts, saying the five states recognize older workers as "an experience dividend," rather than a drain on resources.

"Older workers have so much to give," said Roger Forrester, 66, who came out of retirement to help establish the Pima Council on Aging's Mature Worker Connection in Tucson in 2005. "The work ethic, the experience, the dependability, those are three of the big reasons it makes good business sense (to keep them in the workforce)."

The free job-placement service he directs, part of the Mature Workforce Initiative, won one of two Civic Ventures awards for Arizona.

The other went to GateWay Community College in Phoenix for working with the Arizona initiative on developing the Center for Workforce Transition.

The center, with funding from the Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust, is expected to open by the end of April, Starns said. It will help older job seekers assess their abilities and training needs.

The challenge with older adults, Forrester said, "is to help them determine what they want to do in what we call their 'encore career.'"

Aiding those efforts, the Arizona initiative also is working with Jobing.com to build a job bank and resource portal for mature workers. The site, [azmatureworkers.com](http://azmatureworkers.com), will list paid and volunteer jobs starting in April.

"As you get older, you may need to work or just want to work," said Starns, executive director of the Governor's Office on Aging. "But you may not want to do the same thing you've been doing for 30 years."

What older workers are looking for in a work environment — a place to stay engaged and active, to do something meaningful while feeling in control of their lives — likely has changed, she said. The initiative will recognize businesses that create "mature worker-friendly" environments, she added.

"You're at the point where you're not interested in working 80 hours a week," Starns said. "You might want more than two weeks of vacation

because you'd like to spend more time with the grandkids.

"All this is going to require businesses to think differently about things like workplace flexibility. But the good news is that a lot of the accommodations they can make for mature workers are also really appealing to Generation Y. That younger generation wants a better balance between work and home, and that's what mature workers are looking for, as well."

### Retired and working

People such as Florence and Peter Polk, 71-year-olds whose days are filled with work and volunteering, are finding that balance in a varying mix of encore careers, retirement and community service.

Peter has become a voracious reader and a public speaker since retiring about five years ago from a career in health-care management in the Midwest and Southwest. He also spends much of his time volunteering.

He serves on the committee for the Mature Workforce Initiative, meeting with other older people and business and government representatives, and he developed a mentoring program for mature job seekers at St. Patrick's Catholic Church in Scottsdale.

His wife, Florence, who

works three shifts a week as a neonatal intensive-care nurse at Scottsdale Healthcare Shea, doesn't plan to retire for another year and a half or so. Scottsdale Healthcare has received an AARP Best Employer award for the past five years for recruiting and retaining employees 50 and older.

Getting benefits and building retirement savings are pluses, Florence said. But her biggest reward is working with babies.

"I enjoy going to work, and I enjoy the people I work with," she said, adding that she still finds time to spend with her six kids, 18 grandchildren and three great-grandchildren, do yardwork, make quilts and travel.

"I almost feel like I'm retired anyway," she said.

Forrester retired at 58 after working 34 years in human resources at the University of Minnesota. Looking for a warmer climate, he and his wife fell in love with Tucson.

"But after moving here and playing a lot of tennis and golf and doing some volunteer work, I started getting restless," he said. "I've been fortunate in my career and my life, and I wanted to give something back."

He approached Jim Murphy at the Pima Council on Aging, and the Mature Worker Connection was born. Now, Forrester is working full time again, helping others find the rewards he continues to experience on the job.

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