

# Seniors Get a Second Chance at Employment

Community Perspective by Tom Howard

Darae worked most of her life in physically demanding jobs such as construction and now hopes to get into a new career that is less physical. Dick worked for over 30 years as a bricklayer and now wants a career where he can stay healthy and not be injured. Daisy worked for years on an Air Force base as a commander's secretary using typewriters and dial telephones. She is now gaining the skills necessary to function in an office with computers, fax machines, copiers, scanners, and high-tech phone systems.

These are typical circumstances of trainees involved in the MASST program. MASST stands for Mature Alaskans Seeking Skills Training. The MASST program, federally known as the Senior Community Service Employment Program, provides training and part-time paid work experience opportunities for low-income individuals age 55 and older. The program helps Alaska retain the valuable resources of older workers while enabling older workers to maintain an independent lifestyle and make meaningful contributions to their communities. The program assists mature Alaskans with skills training, job search and placement into unsubsidized employment.

In Interior Alaska, the MASST program is administered by Adult Learning Programs of Alaska. ALPA is a non-profit community-based organization that has provided adult education services to Fairbanks and Interior Alaska continuously since 1975. ALPA has been awarded the MASST grant by the Alaska Commission on Aging since 2001.

People over 55 have many highly sought-after skills, and their work ethics are unparalleled. They are dependable, reliable, and enjoy being a productive part of the work force. Mature Alaskans receive their skills training primarily by working in community host agencies. Host agencies are community service assignments in public or non-profit agencies such as hospitals, senior centers, units of local government and Native American and tribal organizations. While placed in host agencies, older workers expand their skills and at the same time earn income. In addition, the MASST program utilizes ALPA's many adult education resources such as computer classes, reading, writing, math, GED preparation and testing, resume writing, and interview workshops. Many older workers find computer classes extremely beneficial to prepare them for work in today's computer-driven businesses.

Once a person is determined to be eligible for MASST, their employment goals are discussed. It's good to know what people have done for work in the past and what they would like to do in the future and it also helps to make a good match for the host agency. The trainee is then placed in the host site to work 20 hours a week, and they receive Alaska's \$7.15 minimum wage for those hours. <sup>3</sup>The program is a win-win situation: qualified agencies and corporations get temporary employees while at the same time mature Alaskans receive skills training and eventually go on to unsubsidized employment.

The best way for a person to proceed is to call the MASST specialist located in the Job Center in downtown Fairbanks for an over-the-phone pre-assessment. The numbers are 451-3144 or 452-6434 extension 23. Non-profit agencies or government entities should also call those numbers to find out how to get a MASST trainee into their work site.

***Tom Howard is program director for Mature Alaskans Seeking Skills Training.***