



Governor to announce Mature Worker Initiative

Gov. Mike Huckabee will formally announce the Arkansas Mature Worker Initiative at 10 a.m. April 12 in the Governor's Conference Room at the Capitol.

AARP selected Arkansas as a pilot state for this national initiative. The initiative will work with community partners to encourage mature workers (age 50+) to remain in the labor force and employers to hire from this group.

Current projections indicate that 43 percent of the current workforce will be eligible for retirement in the next 10 years. In addition, 61 percent of new entrants into the labor force (age 16 to 25) will

not be fully qualified. These factors will result in a significant decrease in the availability of qualified workers.

AARP hopes to increase the awareness and appreciation of mature workers by developing relationships with the public workforce system, states, chambers of commerce, national and local training providers, trade associations, labor unions, community organizations, policy makers and business leaders.

The national AARP office has selected several national employers to participate in the Featured Employers Program. The program identifies employers who have made a commitment to hiring mature

workers. Several of the following companies have operations in Arkansas: The Home Depot, Adecco, Allied Barton, Borders Group, Cendant Car Rental Group - Avis/Budget, Cingular Wireless, Comcast Cable, CVS/pharmacy, Express Personnel Services, Johns Hopkins Medicine, Kelly Services Inc., Manpower Inc., MetLife Inc., New York Life Insurance Co., News America Marketing, Quest Diagnostics, Pitney Bowes Inc., Principal Financial Group, Right at Home, Schneider National Inc., SunTrust Banks Inc., Universal Health Services, Verizon and Walgreens.

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Employees' efforts result in smooth TEA transition

Since the passage of Act 1705 of 2005 that transferred the Transitional Employment Assistance Program from the Department of Health and Human Services to the Department of Workforce Services, both agencies have implemented several initiatives to make the transition smooth.

The TEA program provides assistance to low-income parents who qualify for services. To ensure TEA clients receive uninterrupted services, the transfer of staff and resources had to be seamless.

TEA staff who transferred to DWS received a two-day agency orientation. Staff were provided information on the programs DWS administers and how the TEA program fits into the DWS mission. Attendees were also provided information on the reporting structure, client flow and transition plans.

In January, TEA staff received training
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By charging combined wage claims to employers, trust fund saves money

Unemployed individuals with wages in more than one state have the option of filing a combined wage claim. The state in which the CWC claim is filed becomes the paying state, and its laws are used to determine benefit eligibility.

When a CWC claim is filed, the paying state requests the other state(s) in which the claimant has wages to "transfer" those wages to the paying state for use in the CWC claim. If the claimant draws CWC benefits, the paying state bills each transferring state for its pro rata share of the benefits paid.

Until recently, Arkansas has not had the ability to charge these CWC billings to specific employers. This inability to charge has had two negative consequences. First,

Arkansas' Unemployment Insurance Trust Fund has been forced to absorb these costs. When these costs are spread across the trust fund, all Arkansas employers, in essence, wind up footing the bill rather than the CWC claimants' specific former employers.

Secondly, the absorption of these costs by the trust fund results in a smaller trust fund balance. A small trust fund balance has the potential to increase contribution amounts paid by Arkansas employers as it directly affects the unemployment insurance stabilization tax rates – the greater the trust fund balance the smaller the stabilization tax.

In the past, employers received a Notice to Base Period Employer (ARK ESD 550) for CWC claims but
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were not charged for the benefits paid. Arkansas now has the ability to charge employers for wages used in the CWC claims. Employers will continue receiving the Notice to Base Period Employer, and beginning in July 2006 the Quarterly Statement of Paid Benefits Charged to Your Account (ARK ESD 546 for tax-rated employers and 547 for reimbursable employers) will reflect CWC charges as well.

Please be aware that at the time the Notice to Base Period Employer is mailed the potential CWC charge amount is not available and will not be listed. **Employers should respond to these notices even though the potential charge amount is not listed.**

CWC charges listed on the Quarterly Statement of Paid Benefits Charged to Your Account are marked "CWC." CWC charges will generally be one quarter behind regular benefit charges.

The process for Requesting Review of Charges (protest) does not change as a result of the addition of CWC charges. Employers must make such requests in writing within 30 days of the mailing date of the Statement of Paid Benefits Charged to Your Account. Additionally, failure to protest charges the first time they appear for an individual results in forfeiture of the right to request review on subsequent charges for the individual on a claim for the same benefit year.

In conclusion, the ability to charge for CWC benefits is a positive step for Arkansas' unemployment insurance system as it will improve the stability of the trust fund and effect a fundamental tenet of our tax rating system – benefit charges are to be assigned to employers responsible for the costs. Those with questions should contact Doris Martin, the Charge Unit manager, at (501) 682-3313.

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on how to use the Arkansas Job Link System, an Internet-based self-service system that matches employers and qualified job seekers. Because a portion of TEA case management involves placing TEA clients into jobs, AJL is a valuable component toward achieving that goal.

AJL is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week for employers who wish to post their own job orders and to job seekers interested in applying for jobs. Assistance also is available at the Arkansas Workforce Centers.

TEA staff will also attend upcoming regional meetings to discuss issues regarding the transition. At these meetings, staff will be informed about upcoming changes to the TEA program because of budget reconciliation and the implementation of the Arkansas Work Pays program in July 2006.

Besides training for the TEA staff, DWS local office managers and area operations chiefs received training on their responsibilities under the TEA program. Managers also received training on the ANSWER case management system used to document TEA client data and work activities. Later this month, managers will attend training on case management activities.

DHHS and DWS employees are working to develop eligibility and case management policy for the Arkansas Work Pays program. The program will allow up to 3,000 former TEA clients to receive supportive services and case management activities that will lead to increased earnings for the family.

Participants will be eligible for the same support services and assistance as families enrolled in the TEA program and will receive monthly cash assistance equal to the maximum monthly TEA benefit for a family of three with no income.

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To promote the program in Arkansas, Gov. Huckabee requested in January 2005 that the Arkansas Workforce Investment Board make this initiative one of its top priorities. The board created the Statewide Initiative for Mature Job Seekers and Employers Committee. Representatives from the board, DWS, AARP, state agencies and the public comprise the committee.

In January 2005 Arkansas received the AARP Mature Worker Concept Paper that outlines activities to promote the initiative. In March 2005, local and national AARP officials met with state agencies to review the paper and discuss the state plan.

In September 2005, Gov. Huckabee signed a proclamation announcing "Hire Older Workers Week." A copy of this proclamation is available on the DWS Web site at www.arkansas.gov/esd.

The AWIB subcommittee has been planning regional meetings and other activities. On March 27, AARP's Web sites will be linked to the DWS, AWIB and Arkansas Job Link Web sites.

Beginning in April, several regional meetings with community and business leaders will be held around the state to encourage support. Arkansas employers who are successfully utilizing mature workers will speak at the meetings.

The first meeting will be held from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. April 18 at the Business and Industry Center at Pulaski Technical College in Little Rock.

Other meetings are planned for Hot Springs, Fort Smith, Springdale, Mountain Home, South-Central and East-Northeast Arkansas.

In August 2006, representatives from the AWIB committee and employers will make a presentation at the Arkansas Economic Development Conference.

As more employers and mature workers become aware of the initiative, Arkansas Workforce Center staff stands ready to provide assessment, employment and training assistance.

Those wanting more information can call Kimberly Friedman with DWS at (501) 682-3125 or Rebecca Trammell with AWIB at (501) 371-1033.

Work Opportunity and Welfare-to-Work Tax Credits

For information, go to
www.arkansas.gov/esd/ForEmployer/A_wotc.htm.
You also can call your local Arkansas Workforce Center
or 1-866-330-9459.