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Teaching as a Second, or Even Third, Career

BY Elizabeth Olson
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AT 65, Walt Patteson has two careers behind him and is relishing his third as a high school chemistry teacher. He is one of the retirement-age Americans who are finding new uses for their skills by deciding to teach.



As the baby boomers reach retirement age, some of those

anticipating a new career are enrolling at community colleges and in state-approved or private programs to convert their professional expertise to the classroom. Even the recent public criticism of teachers and cuts in school budgets have not deterred retirees from getting teaching credentials — and finding paying jobs, especially in math, science and special education.

Many come to teaching later in life because they want a challenge. Some want to do good or keep active. Others need an income or a supplement to retirement savings. And some, like Mr. Patteson, need a nudge to explore teaching.

“My wife told me she wasn’t going to keep working while I went out every day to play golf,” Mr. Patteson said. After 10 years in the Navy, where he was a pilot, he returned home to help run his family’s farm in Tracy, Calif. But two decades later, in 1999, when the farm was sold, he was only 53 and he wanted to do something community minded.

Mr. Patteson, who had been a local school board member, heard about an opening at the nearby West High School to teach science, and decided to build on his science and math background to become a teacher. Taking part in one of California’s 70 alternative teaching preparation programs, he passed an exam to measure his chemistry knowledge, then took classes and taught. He earned the state’s credential to teach chemistry in 2004.

Like California, where alternative teaching programs are grouped under the California Teacher Corps, all 50 states allow aspiring teachers to bypass the traditional education degree and take a shorter route to the classroom — using the knowledge acquired from college and careers.

Although there is no official tracking of educators older than 50, the nonprofit National Center for Education Information's "Profile of Teachers in the U.S. 2011" found that 54,000 of new teacher hires, or about one-third, in the 2007-8 school year were "delayed entrants," people with college degrees who did not enter teaching right after college.

While the battered economy has meant fewer teacher retirements than expected, many school districts still have openings in math, science, special education and English as a second language. By the end of the decade, 440,000 new elementary and secondary teachers will be needed as the total number of teachers reaches slightly more than four million, as projected by the National Center for Education Statistics, part of the Education Department.

Many openings will be in math and science. According to a 2007 study, public schools will need more than 280,000 new math and science teachers by 2015, especially those in low-income school districts. The report was issued by the Business-Higher Education Forum, a national group of senior business and higher education executives.

Among the Web sites available to guide older career changers is Teach.gov, started by the Education Department last year. The teacher recruitment site lists each state's alternative certification programs and facts about financial aid, school districts and licensing and certification.

Teach.gov also tracks elementary and secondary teaching openings — 663 nationwide were listed early this month, most in early childhood and special education. It also lists the top three states now hiring: Massachusetts, South Carolina and Illinois.

"There is an incredible opportunity here for those who are pursuing encore careers," said Brad Jupp, senior program aide to the education secretary, Arne Duncan, who helped start the site.

Some people pursuing second or third careers are earning teaching credentials at community colleges. Civic Ventures, a San Francisco research organization for baby boomers, and the MetLife Foundation recently gave 25 community colleges around the country a one-time \$25,000 grant to encourage people 50 and older to switch to teaching.

Harold Washington College, in midtown Chicago, used its grant to advertise in the Chicago Symphony playbill and the Lyric Opera guide. It wanted to attract people over 50 who had master's degrees to enter its program to learn about becoming adjunct college instructors.

"We hire 250 instructors a year, and science and math skills are at a premium," said John Hader, associate dean at the college. "We chose 55 applicants who qualified in these areas and taught them how to manage a classroom, assess student learning levels, use educational technology and encourage active learning."

Some companies help pay for second-career teachers. Barry Ostrer, who spent 32 years with I.B.M. in White Plains, took advantage of its Transition to Teaching program, which gives as much as \$15,000 to employees of at least 10 years who want a career in education.

Mr. Ostrer began his second career this month teaching math to fifth graders at a private school in Englewood, N.J. He earned a bachelor's degree in math at Tufts and reignited his interest in the subject while tutoring the children of friends.

Over six years, taking one or two courses at a time, he earned a master's degree in teaching from Manhattanville College in Purchase in 2010.

“This is a way for me to help students overcome math anxiety,” said Mr. Ostrer, 54, who worked at I.B.M. in programming and sales and as a liaison with industry analysts. “I’m way too young to do nothing.”

Teaching offers other rewards, Mr. Patteson found. His students and colleagues provided support when his wife became ill, and died in 2008, he said. As long as he can do the work, he is not considering retiring from his third career. “It’s a little like having 150 grandchildren,” he said. “They’ll talk to you about things they’d never bring up with their parents. You can discipline, scold, cajole and motivate them in ways that they would rebel against if someone else tried it.”

Web sites that help with the decision to teach:

- Teach.gov, an Education Department site that lists, by state, alternative certification programs; information on financial aid, school districts, and licensing and certification as well as state-specific teacher openings.
- TheApple.monster.com is a guide to alternative programs to speed certification for people who have college degrees but lack teaching experience, and to find teacher shortage areas.
- AllEducationSchools.com has information on teaching subjects like science, and links to learn about how to be certified.
- Teachers-Teachers.com lists jobs for teachers, administrators and others.
- Encore.org, the Civic Ventures site, provides information about second, and third, careers, including links to learning and work opportunities and ways to connect with people and groups involved in encore careers.
- Cateachercorps.org, the California Teacher Corps site, helps connect to the 70 alternative preparation programs.
- Alt-teachercert.org, the National Association for Alternative Certification site, provides information about nontraditional educator preparation.
- Abcte.org, the American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence site, has information on finding, preparing and certifying teachers.
- Ncei.com, the National Center for Education Information site, provides a profile of American teachers and links to information about teacher preparation, certification and licensing.