

Lorane Edwards

For the love of the job, working past retirement

By FRANK KONKEL
Sentinel-Standard writer

IONIA — Don't tell Lorane Edwards growing old means you are supposed to retire.

It would be a waste of her time. And if it was between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, she'd probably be working anyway.

"I'm definitely not ready to retire yet," the 71-year-old Edwards said. "If I didn't like what I do, or didn't get the respect I deserve for doing it after this many years, then retirement might be an option."

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— Lorane Edwards

Edwards is a food service specialist at the Ionia Commission on Aging and has been employed in Ionia since 1979.

In 28 years, she hasn't grown tired of what she does, which includes directing more than 350 weekly food deliveries and more than 150,000 meals per year. Handling the budget is no sweat, and neither is organizing hundreds of food plans.

When Edwards leaves her office —



Sentinel-Standard/FRANK KONKEL

Lorane Edwards still looks forward to going in for a 40-hour work week, even at the age of 71. Though it might seem unusual now, work trends look to make Edwards more the norm in a few years

and it is her office, just read the door, labeled in gold stenciling: "Lorane's Domain" — on Friday afternoons, she's still fulfilled a 40-hour work week.

According to Edwards, she began her

career late — in her forties — and there is no way she'd end it early, too. Her six children, she said, were a full-time job. Once they were out on their own, Edwards wasn't about to sit around.

"I've got to do something," Edwards said. "I'm a big believer in not being bored. Boredom is a killer."

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Employers across the state recognize and honor workers like Edwards through the 2007 National Employ Older Worker's Week, from Sept. 23-29. The U.S. labor force is aging due in large part to the significant baby boomer population — those individuals born between 1946 and 1964 — and figures to keep increasing.

A 2007 study by the American Association for Retired Persons concludes that by 2012, more than two in five workers in America are projected to be age 45 and older, up from only 37 percent in 2002.

Perhaps even more shockingly, 68 percent of age 50 to 70 year-old not-yet-retired workers plan to work in some capacity into their retirement years — or not retire at all.

Edwards' case might have once seemed like the exception to the rule, but statistics show that in the very near future, the grandmothers and grandfathers of our country might be working more than their grandchildren.

And it might not be a bad thing, especially considering the importance of past work experience.

“With their labor skills and experience, strong work ethic,

flexibility and dedication, older adults are a valuable asset to their employers and communities,” said David Dekker, senior resources specialist for the Michigan Office of Services to the Aging. “Older adults are playing an increasingly important role in maintaining our economy and asserting America's leadership in the world marketplace.”

While Edwards intends to keep using her formidable skills for “at least a few more years,” she still finds time to spend time with her family. Besides her six children and her husband of 43 years, Mike, she has 14 grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

Sometimes Edwards will turn on the television and watch for interesting recipes on the Food Network or catch an episode of *Murder She Wrote*. Or you might catch her engrossed in the latest mystery novel or scrambling to finish a Sudoku word puzzle.

Whatever Edwards is doing, it's likely she's staving off boredom. As successful as she's been at that for the past three decades, what is her advice to those approaching retirement age?

“I would tell them to keep busy and do things that keep you interested and alert, whether it's work-related or not,” Edwards said. “Use it or lose it.”