A growing number of males believe it doesn’t pay to hold a job

By Lisa Eckelbecker
TELEGRAM & GAZETTE STAFF

PEPPERELL — John C. Newingham’s last steady job ended five years ago in a burst of corporate budget cutting.

BOC Gases, his work home for 22 years, the company that hired him out of the Army as a dispatcher and promoted him up the ladder to plant manager, eliminated his job as part of a drive to consolidate management of its plants.

Since then, Mr. Newingham, 53, has worked little more than a few months for a now-defunct Internet service provider. He hasn’t given up on finding a job, but he understands why others do.

“I think the longer you go unemployed, the harder it is to work,” he said. “I think you reach a point where you basically pack it in and say, ‘That’s that.’”

All too many Massachusetts men, it seems, are doing exactly that.

For reasons ranging from industrial upheaval to personal disillusionment, Massachusetts men have been leaving the labor force for more than a decade.

Young men are not starting jobs in the numbers they once did. Older men are leaving jobs and not taking new ones.

Even as the economy boomed in the 1990s, about 76,000 working-age men disappeared from the state’s labor force, according to figures from Northeastern University that are adjusted for population changes.

Fewer working men may not seem a serious problem now, a period in which job openings are scarce and plenty of people stand willing to fill them. But some economists warn that the situation bodes ill for the future when the economy improves and employers need more workers.

The state might not possess enough willing, skilled workers to fuel economic growth, according to Andrew M. Sum, director of the Northeastern University Center for Labor Market Studies. He documented changes in men’s employment during the 1990s in a report titled “The Absent Male Worker.”

The professor warns that men who do not work could drain the economy by collecting government benefits while paying little or no taxes, and they could even have trouble connecting with women, who seem more likely to pursue education and jobs.

“Fiscally and socially, these are all great disasters,” Mr. Sum said.

For Mr. Newingham, there was never any intent to stay out of work. He took computer classes at Boston University, hoping to jump into the then red-hot computer industry. Then came the dot-com bust and the recession.

He fell back on savings that he once hoped would enable him to retire early. More recently, he enrolled in a computer class in Leominster offered by the government-funded agency Experience Works.

“I don’t know if it’s the length of time I’ve been out of work, or my age,” Mr. Newingham said during a break from his computer course. “I’ve tried to eliminate as much reference to my age as possible on my resume, but it’s hard.”

In fact, male workers of all ages have disappeared from the labor force. Young, old, in between — their ranks thinned between 1990 and 2000.

Census figures show the percentage of working-age men in the Massachusetts labor force slid from 75.6 percent to 72.4 percent during the 1990s. That means fewer men worked or looked for work even as the population of working-age men expanded by 102,000.

Moreover, figures show all but the oldest men bailing out of the state’s workforce in significant numbers.

• Nearly 78 percent of Massachusetts men age 20 to 24 were in the labor force in 1990. By 2000 that rate had dropped to 73.5 percent.

• Almost 92 percent of men in their middle years, age 25 to 54, were counted in the labor force in 1990. The rate was down to 87.5 percent 10 years later.

• And among men in their later working years, those age 55 to 64, the slide was from 73.5 percent to 71.3 percent over the decade.

What happened to women makes the phenomenon even more remarkable. Mr. Sum and his colleagues at Northeastern found that women generally stayed on the job or left the labor force at rates lower than men.

In addition, older women boosted their work. The percentage of women age 55 to 64 who were in the labor force rose to 58.7 percent from 54 percent during the 1990s.

Overall, about 60 percent of Massachusetts women were in the labor force in the 1990s, a rate that remained essentially unchanged even as men were dropping out.

The precise reasons for women’s adherence to work are unclear, but greater opportunities and greater penalties likely kept women in the labor force, said Ellen Bravo, director of Milwaukee-based 9 to 5, the National Association of Working Women. Affluent and educated women have had more job opportunities, she said, and poor women were pushed into work by welfare reform.

“Many of these women were driven to take any job, regardless of the consequences, because of welfare reform,” Ms. Bravo said.

Men, in contrast, say multiple factors led to their break with the working world.

For young men, who are increasingly less likely than...
Region, nation losing midlevel jobs held by men

young women to pursue high school and college degrees, the problem has included a lack of work skills.

Older men, especially those from the region’s beleaguered manufacturing sector, say they cannot find appropriate jobs. Some blame age discrimination on the part of employers. Others find the U.S. market has little demand for their skills as machinists, plant managers or technology specialists, jobs that have gone overseas.

Some men regardless of age, economists contend, simply calculate that it doesn’t pay to work, that the jobs they can obtain pay so little that they can survive on pensions, Social Security, welfare, disability payments, savings or off-the-books jobs.

The median annual earnings of men in New England were essentially unchanged during the 1990s at about $40,000, according to Census figures. Only those men with earnings in the upper half of all men saw any increase in earnings.

“This opportunity cost is just the key, it really is the key,” said Robert A. Nakosteen, a professor of finance at the University of Minnesota and editor of “Minnesota Benchmarks,” an economic publication. “They ain’t got great jobs to start with. They aren’t giving up much when they quit them.”

Minnesota is not alone in its labor force shifts. The nation’s population of working-age men grew 14.1 percent during the 1990s, but the percentage of men in the labor force grew only 9.4 percent.

In 1990, 72.8 percent of U.S. working-age men were working or looking for work. By 2000, that percentage was down to 69.8 percent.

Numerous states have noticed the trend.

Illinois economists reported that the percentage of Illinois men in the labor force dropped to 76 percent in 1998 from 78 percent in 1990.

Minnesota demographers noted that 93.9 percent of men in their prime working years, age 25 to 54, were working or looking for work in 1990. Ten years later, that percentage was 91.3 percent for men in the same age group.

The reason for the change is unclear, but Minnesota demographers plan to watch the trends, said Martha J. McMurry, research analyst for the state demographic center.

“Last decade, or late in the decade when the economy was strong, the labor shortage was a big issue,” Ms. McMurry said. “I think if the economy heats up again, that’ll become an issue again: How come we can’t attract more people into the labor force?”

Men’s work changes occurred against a backdrop of economic and industrial change over the last half of the 20th century. About 45 million women surged into the work force. U.S. corporations, seeking to hold down costs and attract international customers, moved operations abroad. New technologies brought greater factory productivity during the late 1990s.

One result was that manufacturing jobs melted away, leaving fewer options for men who lacked college educations. U.S. manufacturers have eliminated about 5 million jobs since a peak of 19.6 million jobs in 1979, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Men who once worked in factories or contemplated careers on production lines — found themselves driving vans, selling tools at The Home Depot or doing nothing.

“We’re losing those middle class, mid-level jobs that don’t require college degrees,” said former U.S. labor secretary Robert B. Reich, now a professor of social and economic policy at Brandeis University. “The labor force is becoming more polarized, with the top 20 percent doing significantly better, the top 1 percent doing magnificently better and the bottom 60 percent going nowhere or going downhill.”

Once displaced, some men find their skills ill-suited to new jobs.

One man who had spent his entire work life as a tool and die maker ended up before Patricia J. Read at Experience Works, but resisted the computer training she offered.

“He said that he had made his living his whole life using his hands, and he wasn’t inclined to sit down and use a computer and keyboard,” she said.

Some retraining may even carry a stigma for men whose pride lay in other occupations.

“Particularly if they’ve been skilled in a trade and know how to use machines and can do very technical work, I think the idea of sitting down at a keyboard — it may be that they view it as a clerical task,” Ms. Read said.

Or it just may be that men with a lifetime of skills and experience consider it impractical to reinvent themselves.

Sheldon Zaklow of Millbury sent resumes to more than 1,700 manufacturers after he lost his job as an abrasives plant manager.

Two interviews, 15 telephone conversations, no job offers. Mr. Zaklow’s job hunt was going nowhere.

He joined two job search groups and four networking groups. Still nothing.

He tapped into his savings to fund day-to-day living expenses. Now, it’s running down.

At the age of 61, a mechanical engineer by training and a manufacturing manager by experience, Mr. Zaklow is searching for options.

“Retraining isn’t possible,” he said. “What would I do?”

The larger question appears to be what will industry and government do, if anything.

Massachusetts’ population is growing slowly, rising by only 200,469, or 4 percent during the 1990s. The labor force grew only 66,089, or 2 percent, during the same period.

The last time the state confronted a shortage of labor, in the 1990s, employers were forced to rely on immigrants and workers they relocated at great cost.

But in a state such as Massachusetts, where employers tolerate relatively high costs for access to knowledgeable workers, a stagnant labor force could become an economic development issue.

As Northeastern’s Mr. Sum put it, “Who wants to come to Massachusetts if you’ve got to scramble to get well-qualified workers?”

T&G Staff/LIZ RUSSELL
Moving on

Older men feeling left behind by changing economy

Timothy C. Beers stands in front of his Louisville, Ky. home. Mr. Beers sold his house in Westboro and moved after work dried up.
Older men aren’t often an employer’s first choice

Market Studies at Northeastern University. “Once you’re past 45, you don’t often go into training programs.”

J. Michael Hull, 53, has been scraping and painting since being laid off from Morgan Construction Co. of Worcester in 2001.

Mr. Hull, whose job as an information technology project leader was eliminated, now finds himself increasingly relying upon his wife, a clinical psychotherapist, to pick up the financial slack. He works around Worcester, replacing windows and doors and renovating bathrooms.

“There’s not many jobs for a 50-year-old guy in information technology,” he said while making repairs to a Worcester three-decker he and his wife own as a rental property.

Mr. Hull said he’s not sure he’d ever work for someone else even if a job offer came along. A grim outlook confronts the manufacturing industry — the traditional loyalty between employee and employer long gone, obliterated in a global economy that can easily move capital around the world, he said.

Worcester, and other large cities, once had a manufacturing base that could sustain a middle class, Mr. Hull said. The former Norton Co. or Wyman-Gordon Co. provided salaries and benefits that enabled workers to move up the economic ladder, he said.

But an economy of pizza shops, nail salons and call centers lacks opportunities for advancement, making it difficult to improve the next generation’s standard of living, he said.

“You can’t have an entirely service industry economy,” he said. “You’ve got to make something. You have to have an end. If you don’t have that, it’s kind of scary for your kids.”

Men who grew old wearing safety glasses on the job were often the first to lose their jobs in recent years. But younger men are also feeling the pinch and fear they’re no longer even an economic statistic.

Robert A. Laabs, 37, of Webster, has been out of work for 18 months. He searches for work on the Internet.

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The loss of stable, well-paying manufacturing jobs, which has pushed many older men out of the workforce, has another dimension that bears attention, said Tom Juravich, a professor and director of the labor relations and research center at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

Young men without college degrees commonly drift from job to job for a few years. For much of the 20th century, such men often settled into manufacturing jobs by the time they turned 30, Mr. Juravich said.

People stayed at those companies for decades and moved up the company ladder, creating and sustaining a solid middle class — a trend that isn’t being replicated in the 21st century, he said.

“I worry about the ordinary Joe,” Mr. Juravich said. “Where are they going to go? The Norton Co. has given way to Subway. You can make the best tuna sub in the world, but there’s no ability to move forward.”

Kevin P. Tremblay of Sturbridge knows what it’s like to be stuck in neutral.

Mr. Tremblay, 43, was laid off this year from OFS-Fitel, an optical fiber and glass preform plant in Sturbridge. He had worked for the company for more than six years and most recently was a data base administrator with an annual salary of $51,000.

Mr. Tremblay said he has risen early on weekdays for the past six months, scanning several hundred job postings on the Internet. Later in the day, he reads the help wanted sections in some area newspapers — but to date, his electronic resume has landed him only four interviews.

When he drives around the area and notices new homes under construction, he wonders if he should have stayed in the blue-collar sector of the economy.

“If I was still a carpenter, I’d probably be working right now,” he said. “My unemployment runs out at the end of the year so we’re getting down to the wire.”

A 1977 graduate of Bay Path Regional Vocational Technical High School in Charlton, Mr. Tremblay said his lack of a college education puts him at a disadvantage.

“They look at the resume and see I’m only a high school graduate,” he said. “But a resume can’t possibly tell them I’ve got ambition and motivation.”

In conversations with older, unemployed men, hints of disappointment and resentment often color their remarks, said Mr. Juravich, who is writing a book on contemporary workplaces.

Some have the means of pulling up roots and going elsewhere. But many have limited resources or lack the requisite skills that can be transferred to other parts of the country, he said.

“We built this commonwealth on their backs,” he said. “Many of them are angry and it’s an issue we’re not dealing with politically or socially. We’ve pushed them back into the privacy of their homes and made them invisible.”
The average age of a Massachusetts health care worker is 43, an age that means many workers have teen-agers thinking about college, one of the reasons UMass Memorial will offer financial planning sessions.

"You have to hear from your employees a lot," said Ms. Bono, whose annual staff turnover rate has dropped from 18 percent to 11.5 percent this year. Flexibility and creativity will become more important in the 21st century workplace because the country’s population is expected to grow more slowly than ever before, age more rapidly and once again become a homogeneous melting pot.

The aging population is the result of baby boom retirements, a decline in U.S. fertility rates and an increase in life expectancy.

Those companies that trimmed employment rolls with lucrative retirement incentive packages obtained short-term benefits, but are now confronting thornier problems that money can’t always solve, said Joseph Mongelli, a principal with the consulting firm Towers Perrin.

Phased retirements, which enable a worker to gradually detach from a company’s work force, are being contemplated at many companies. Telecommuting and other traditional schedules also are being considered as companies contemplate if and how they want to retain their older workers.

But complex tax and pension laws make many companies hesitant to single out older employees for better or special treatment, Mr. Mongelli said. Providing health insurance for part-time, older workers is another incentive that could ease the coming labor crunch. But many companies are doing everything possible to reduce the cost of their health insurance premiums.

“There’s a little bit of paralysis among companies,” said Mr. Mongelli. “They understand all these issues, but they don’t know what to do about it.”

Early retirement policies and frequent downsizing help companies cut costs, but they run counter to what’s needed to cope with future shortages of talent and experience, according to an April 2003 report by the Conference Board, a business-supported research organization.

The report, which surveyed 150 companies, found that companies were making increased use of retirees for a variety of consulting and short-term assignments. But such arrangements have limited expansion capabilities in a strong economy. Experts believe the economic doldrums of the past three years gave companies some breathing room. Many retirement savings accounts were decimated in recent years and those who once thought about retiring are being forced to work longer than expected.

In a survey two years ago, about 15 percent of National Grid’s work force was 55 or older, Ms. Herbert said. The utility, which in the past had a so-called womb-to-tomb reputation, is starting to feel the pinch of an aging work force and will focus on how to manage those needs over the next few months.

“The market is in a state where people aren’t leaving in droves, but if that market turns around, and it will, we should be concerned,” said Ms. Herbert.

At Banknorth Group Inc., the number of hours a retiree can work has been boosted from 20 hours a month to 40 hours a month, an effort to help fill a growing labor shortage. The Portland, Maine-based bank, which operates Worcester-based Banknorth Massachusetts, has more than 1,100 retirees and about 10 percent are working for the bank on a part-time basis, said spokes-

man Brian Arsenault. “There’s a real value in keeping experience in the organization,” he said. “It’s a shame to have that knowledge go out the door.”

The bank, which employs more than 7,000, has job openings on a regular basis, and is conscious of the demographic forecasts for the New England labor force.

“Over the next three to five years, it will be harder and harder to fill those entry-level jobs unless young people become available.”

Many boomers have been inclined to retire early in order to enjoy the fruits of their labor — a trend aided by employers who lowered the retirement age in defined-benefit pension plans, according to the Conference Board.

While Social Security’s retirement age will gradually rise from 65 to 67, many corporate pension plans allow employees to retire at 60. A retirement age of 65 was established at a time when people were not expected to live as many years into retirement.

But retirees today are in better health and many have gravitated from backbreaking blue-collar work to a white-collar job that involves computer proficiency. Those skills don’t lapse at any magic number and will become increasingly necessary when the labor shortage starts to re-emerge, according to personnel experts.

“We’re no different than everyone else,” said Ms. Herbert. “Everybody could do a better job of retaining their valuable, skilled work force.”
Out of time, out of work

Poor education, work skills dog many young men

By Jim Bodor

Nicholas A. Panarelli had a lot of fun during his years at David Prouty High School in Spencer.

"Maybe a little too much fun," he admitted.

Mr. Panarelli’s grades were average at best, and he acknowledges spending little time thinking about the future. Only after many of his classmates went off to college did he decide to take a few courses at Quinsigamond Community College.

“I don’t really know what I want to do,” he said. “In high school, a few teachers say, ‘This is the real world,’ but most of them don’t tell you much about what’s coming after high school.”

Someone, as Mr. Panarelli put it, “should have slapped me in the head and said, ‘Buckle up, retard.’”

The bearded 19-year-old is among a group of young men who, labor experts fear, are most likely to be unemployed or under-employed during the key years of their adult working lives.

Slowly but steadily, young men who lack college degrees or the focus to pursue a career are being pushed out of the labor force, creating a vacuum that is being filled only partially by females of similar age.

The issue has far-reaching ramifications for the state’s work force, according to those who follow labor trends.

Without a steady stream of skilled workers, the state’s economy could stagnate as the labor participation rate of Massachusetts men ages 20 to 24 fell from 75.5 percent, a drop of 2.4 percent.

The decline may seem small. If the rate had remained steady, another 5,000 men ages 20 to 24 would be part of the state’s productive labor force today.

Young women have fared better.

The labor participation rate of Massachusetts women ages 20 to 24 dropped just one-half of 1 percentage point between 1990 and 2000, according to U.S. Census figures.

Mr. Sum first identified the shrinking number of men in the labor force in a report titled “The Absent Male Worker.”

In that study, he found that in 1990, 77.9 percent of Massachusetts men ages 20 to 24 were employed. By 2000, the number had fallen to 75.5 percent, a drop of 2.4 percent.

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The labor participation rate of Massachusetts women ages 20 to 24 dropped just one-half of 1 percentage point between 1990 and 2000, according to U.S. Census figures.

Mr. Sum is convinced that the reason for the gender gap is obvious: education.

For every 100 men in college in Massachusetts, there are 160 women, a gap that widens at the higher levels of post-secondary education, he found.

“Older men are retiring earlier and earlier,” Mr. Sum said, but younger guys are not entering at the same rate.

Women’s participation peaked in the 1990s, and has been largely unchanged since then.

Meanwhile, traditionally male-dominated fields such as manufacturing are disappearing, while female-dominated fields such as health care are expanding, said Paul E. Harrington, associate director of the Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University.

The number of manufacturing jobs in Massachusetts, for instance, fell 35.1 percent in two decades, from 671,492 in 1979 to 436,126 in 2000. Over that same period, health care-related jobs in the state rose 66.1 percent, from 185,729 in 1979 to 323,664 in 2000.

“It used to be that you could be a high school dropout and you might be able to find a full-time year-round job and learn on the job,” Mr. Harrington said. “Today, those jobs are gone.”

Young men such as Mr. Panarelli sense that they are at risk of falling behind.

Corey A. Coleman, for instance, 18, a Spencer native and close friend of Mr. Panarelli’s, recalls that he rarely studied in high school.

“I’d rather play sports than do my homework,” he said. “I slacked off through high school. Now I’m mad, because all of my friends are away at college and I’m not.”

He said he’d like to go to school to study criminal justice or to learn to become a dental hygienist. “Whatever makes some money.” His female high school classmates, he said, are almost all faring better than himself and his male classmates.

“They’re more mature than us,” he said. “They try harder, and work a little faster.”

Jamie A. Bright, 18, of Sturbridge, said he hated high school. He graduated last year with a 1.7 grade point average, and has no idea what he will do next. He plays guitar and piano and would like to find work in music, but is unsure of how.

When asked whether he wants to start a band or work in production, he said “I’m undecided. There’s no money in music. I’m very undecided.”

He knows he does not want to work in a corporate setting. In Mr. Bright’s view, such careers provide no guarantee of stability and no opportunity for creativity.

“Ten to 20 years from now, most of us, we don’t know what kind of job we’re going to have,” he said. “It may not be what our parents did.”

His friend, Adam S. Kelleher, 19, of Sturbridge, said he also is considering the music industry — or running his own campground. His friends tease him about the campground idea, but he is serious about it.

“I like camping,” he said. “I think it would be cool to own my own campground.”

He’s also candid about another goal: finding a girlfriend, preferably with good career prospects.

“I didn’t get many girls in high school,” he noted. “I’m hoping for more luck.”

“Adam wants a good girl with a good job,” a friend chimed in with considerable laughter.

Young men are bombarded with conflicting images about
Time flies quickly when playing catch-up

what it means to be a successful man, according to Michael E. Addis, associate professor of psychology at Clark University. He has been conducting research on how men seek help for substance abuse, mental health problems and other life crises, among other things.

“The old rules used to be that men should be competitive, successful, self-reliant and emotionally stoic,” Mr. Addis said. “If you followed those rules, you had a likelihood of being accepted by your peers, by women and on the job.”

Today, pop culture blitzes young men with images that mock those old standards of masculinity, he said.

“If you just take a look at any TV show, men are depicted as fools for following these rules,” he said. “I think this creates a quandary for little boys. Essentially, the old rules aren’t working any more.”

Too many young men, even those who have done well in school, suffer from a paralysis caused by a fear of failure, said Jill Sanborne, founder and creator of Mycoolcareer.com, a Web site designed to help young adults choose careers. More than 40,000 teenagers per month visit the Web site.

“With young men, their self-esteem usually comes from what they do,” she said. “In today’s world, with so many jobs and careers to choose from, and little guidance or help in choosing one, they don’t know what to do, they don’t know how to act. They’re paralyzed.”

High schools and colleges across the United States consistently fail to link classroom lessons to actual jobs, she said. Many teachers and professors, Ms. Sanborne added, openly disdain curriculum directly applicable to real-world careers.

“We continue to prepare our youth the same way we did 50 years ago, when the career choices were much more limited,” she said.

It has become necessary for parents to become more involved in their children’s career planning, and help school districts organize career days, Ms. Sanborne said. Businesses should offer internships and invite schools to visit them on field trips.

“While no one is certain if biology plays a role in the success of men, it is known that young boys are more likely to suffer from attention deficit disorder, said Dr. Allan J. Rooney, a Worcester neuropsychologist.

Nationwide, three times as many men as women have been diagnosed with the disorder, he said. Between 3 percent and 7 percent of the U.S. population is believed to have ADD, he said.

Some schools are beginning to adjust teaching styles to help such young men perform better, though they could do more, Dr. Rooney said.

“When you look at the boys I see, and their preferred learning styles, they do better with visual materials, and augmenting visual stimuli with physical activities,” he said. “To a certain extent, that is happening in schools.”

Without a proper education, some young men struggle throughout their late teens and 20s to find a career path that suits their interests and skills, said Donald H. Anderson, director of Workforce Central of Worcester, a state-run employment resources office. Most high schools are not providing the practical guidance that young people need, he said.

“It’s important for kids to get real information about the real working world throughout high school from very early on,” he said. “If you wait till senior year to start thinking about it, they’ll be at a loss as to how to get a job and keep one.”

Fewer men plan on college

Percentage of men and women who both graduated from high school and planned to attend a post-secondary educational program, Class of 2000

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<th>Town</th>
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Source: Northeastern University

Workforce Central helps young men develop the most basic job skills, such as simple communication, dependability and working toward goals. “These are things nobody puts into a curriculum,” he said. “We think kids should just pick this up by osmosis, but they don’t.”

It takes some young men a few years to realize that their dream of making the NBA or becoming a musician is just that, a dream, Mr. Anderson said. Only then do they begin to examine more traditional fields such as manufacturing, health care or banking.

“Kids’ expectations are not realistic,” he said. “They are lacking in role models in the community that give them some perspective, or some sense that I have to work hard now for some greater payoff later.”

The state’s education reform effort and the adoption of the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System testing program have gone a long way toward strengthening students’ basic reading, writing and mathematical skills, Mr. Anderson noted. Now, he said he would like to see a workplace curriculum that teaches every student basic work-related skills to help them find and keep jobs, he said.

“I’ve always wondered if that shouldn’t be the next obvious reform, after MCAS,” Mr. Anderson said.

At Quinsigamond Community College, President Sandra L. Kurtinitis wonders why more young men don’t use the school’s career-oriented programs.

Women account for 65 percent of the school’s 10,000 current students, a steady trend for more than a decade.

“What we’ve seen over the years is that the community college is the route for more women than men,” she said.

“Clearly, more women than men are coming here, and it’s been that way since at least 1995, when I came here.”

By avoiding such schooling, however, young men are missing out on more than an education. Quinsigamond Community College, for instance, offers internship and co-op programs that connect students to such companies as Verizon Communications Inc., Intel Corp. and UPS, among others.

“It’s important for us to keep our eye on the needs of the overall economy, and create programs that give students what they need to be successful at the next level,” Ms. Kurtinitis said.

As for Mr. Panarelli, he said he believes he still has time to choose a career and pursue it seriously. He says he also realizes that the clock is ticking away.

“You don’t realize it at the time, when you’re in high school, that school matters,” he said. “Then, you’re kicking yourself.”

Jim Bodor can be reached at jbodor@telegram.com.
Programs work to salvage youths

By Jim Bodor
TELEGRAM & GAZETTE STAFF

WORCESTER — In a red-brick former elementary school on Waverly Street, teachers work with some of the city’s most at-risk students, many of them adolescent boys with severe emotional and behavioral problems.

Security cameras watch each entrance. Visitors are buzzed in through a locked door, immediately greeted by staff and escorted to Alternative School Principal Michael J. O’Neil’s office. Students are ages 12 to 22, in Grade 7 through Grade 12.

Each of the students has been touched by substance abuse, through personal use or use by a family member. Ninety-eight percent rely on the state’s free lunch program. Ninety percent are on probation or involved with the Department of Youth Services.

Most of them read at a fourth- or fifth-grade level.

“These are kids who have come in from junior or senior high schools. They’ve been through traditional school; they’ve been through vocational school, with no success,” Mr. O’Neil said. “We have to look at unique ways to try to educate them. We are the last stop.”

The odds are slim that the students will attend college, land a job and avoid prison, according to Mr. O’Neil. They are more likely to drop out of the labor force, or disappear into a life of crime, addiction or marginal employment.

In the school, however, he and his staff work hard to instill the basic social skills such students need to have any hope of finding work.

They have had some success. One graduate, for example, went to college and now is in graduate school, Mr. O’Neil said.

The principal is quick to point out that working with such troubled youths is a constant battle, one small step at a time.

A vocational teacher works with some of the students on industrial arts, woodworking and similar skills. Through relationships with places such as Friendly House, the school also finds summer jobs for students.

Most important, Mr. O’Neil said, the school stresses that students must set long-term goals and work toward them. Faced with severe financial pressures at home, Alternative School students often drop out to work a dead-end job or deal drugs.

“We try to teach them how to act around people and on the job,” he said. “We’re really giving them pre-vocational skills. We’re talking about kids coming from families that have been on welfare for multiple generations.”

The Alternative School is just one program to help primarily young men improve their chances of finding work. The Grafton Job Corps and Worcester Vocational High School also have found creative approaches.

The Grafton Job Corps, center director Patrick Van Rooyen faces challenges similar to those faced at the Alternative School. The center is one of 119 nationwide created by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1964 to help disadvantaged youths develop job skills. The federally funded center houses about 300 students, 60 percent of them male.

To be accepted at the center, students must agree to a zero-tolerance drug-use policy and demonstrate a commitment to turning their lives around, Mr. Van Rooyen said. Students with open felony cases are turned away.

At the center, students take courses such as house building, masonry and security services. One track prepares students for military careers. Another teaches plumbing, electrical work or how to become an EKG technician.

Last year, 91.2 percent of the school’s graduates found jobs that paid $9.47 per hour or better, Mr. Van Rooyen said.

Learning to wire a house or install plumbing is only a small part of the center’s work, Mr. Van Rooyen said. The more important task is teaching the qualities that will make students good employees.

“The critical thing is getting students to be punctual, to be well-dressed, to accept direction and to work positively with others,” said Mr. Van Rooyen, a transplanted Australian who routinely picks up discarded gum wrappers and other litter as he walks the school’s Pine Street campus.

“Most employers will train you in the technical skills, but if you’re rude and dressed like a gruff and don’t show up on time, you’re not going to get the job.”

The center is reaching students such as Jason Arias, 19, of Dedham. He is training to be a security officer and hopes to be a military police officer. His days consist of running and physical training in the morning and classroom work in the afternoon, always dressed in his blue security garb.

“We don’t just do one thing,” he said. “We do book work, we do jogging and marching. I like that.”

At Worcester Vocational High School, students for the first time this year are participating in a year-long entrepreneurial program.

Through a partnership with the National Foundation for Teaching Entrepreneurship, the school has developed a curriculum that will teach students to write a business plan, and create and operate a small business.

The National Foundation for Teaching Entrepreneurship has created similar programs at 17,000 schools worldwide, including schools in New York, Connecticut, California, Washington, D.C., and Boston. The program is paid for through contributions from Microsoft Corp. and other companies.

“We tend to do well with kids who have not done well in a traditional educational environment with structured testing,” said National Foundation for Teaching Entrepreneurship spokesman Charles R. Hubbard. “Our program does not rate them in any way other than their ability to make money, which is something they seem to understand and relate to.”

Vocational school teachers said the program introduces students to a different avenue for employment: entrepreneurship. Students who have struggled in a classic school environment tend to be attracted to a career that puts them in charge.
Women empowered

Gender gap widens in education, labor force growth

Women stay, men go
Percentage change of men and women in the labor force from 1990 to 2000

In New England, the figure was more startling: Women made up 90 percent of labor force growth over the decade. That meant 162,000 more women were working or looking for work in 2000 than in 1990, compared with 18,000 more men.

Between 1990 and 2000, the participation of women in the region’s labor force stayed around 60 percent. But the men’s rate fell to 72.7 percent from 75.6 percent, even as the population of working age women and men grew about 4.5 percent.

“Men in New England were considerably less likely to be seeking work at the end of the decade,” according to Northeastern’s report “The Absent Male Worker and the Limited Growth in New England’s Labor Force in the 1990s.”

Paralleling the growth of working women has been their appetite for education. In each year since 1978, data from the National Center for Education Statistics show, more women than men have enrolled in two- and four-year U.S. colleges, with the gap projected to widen through 2011.

In 2001, 61 percent of degrees and certificates awarded by Massachusetts public higher education institutions went to women, a five-year high, according to the state’s Board of Higher Education. Indeed, one analysis shows that for every 100 bachelor’s degrees earned by men in the 1999-2000 U.S. school year, women earned 133, as well as more associates’ and master’s degrees.

The shortage of male workers in New England, offset by the burgeoning growth of women in the labor pool, has implications for the region’s economic development, as well as social and family consequences, said Andrew M. Sum, economics professor, co-author of “The Absent Male Worker,” and director of Northeastern’s Center for Labor Market Studies.

The trend raises several questions:
If men continue to abandon the work force, will employers in the Massachusetts “innovation” economy, which drove job growth in the last decade, face a dearth of technology labor?
Propelled by sheer numbers, are women more likely to finally break the glass ceiling into senior management ranks?
But are they less likely to marry and have children as they encounter a shrinking pool of men with similar education and work experience?

Why women outnumber men in college may turn on a simple equation: Educated workers earn more than those without degrees. By 2008, 65 percent of the estimated million-plus job openings across Massachusetts will require a college education, according to the higher education board.

Catherine M. WoodBrooks, vice president for student life at Assumption College, said that despite great strides over the past 30 years, American women have discovered they need education to succeed in a world in which a gender pay gap remains. The ratio of women’s to men’s earnings was 77.9 percent in 2002, according to the U.S. Department of Labor.

“So the fact that women are understood by men, said Ms. WoodBrooks.

Yet the mismatch between fields of study women choose and the skill demands of a technology economy is of concern.
Gender gap in work also causing social quirks

At the end of 2002, Massachusetts employed 255,744 people in high technology, ranking fifth in such employment nationally, the American Electronics Association reported in “Cyberstates 2003.”

Despite substantial gains, women in the United States still earn fewer than half the bachelor’s degrees in fields that feed technology — mathematics, physical sciences, computer and information science and engineering.

For the moment, the gender gap in degrees is less an issue than job creation. The recession that began in 2001 axed nearly 40,000 Massachusetts technology jobs and spewed the move overseas of information technology jobs - a sector with a gender gap, according to Thomas E. Hubbard, vice president of the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative in Westboro.

“Massachusetts is a state with slow population growth and an aging work force,” he said. “We’ve got to be concerned about cultivating technical talent among students to fuel the technology industry jobs we will have.”

Yet for all the evidence that women don’t go into technical careers and training, “they do favor the life sciences more heavily than men,” Mr. Hubbard said. “This may play to the demand of Massachusetts, given what we hope and expect will be strong growth in life science activity going forward.”

Unilever, led by the women’s movement of the late 1960s and ’70s, supported by equal opportunity mandates, uplifted by education and propelled by desire — and need, as divorce rates soared and resulted in single-parent households such as the one Kim Corwin grew up in — women have altered the equilibrium of the workplace.

But Laura M. Graves, associate professor of management at Clark University and co-author with her husband Gary N. Powell of “Women and Men in Management,” believes women’s advantage in educational attainment won’t much alter corporate boardrooms unless companies implement strategies for change.

“Increases in the educational level of women may enhance the already burgeoning number of women in lower- and middle-level management positions,” she said. “But the proportion of women in senior management has changed very little over the past 20 years, despite the fact that women’s representation among workers, managers and business holders has increased dramatically.”

Organizational culture, leadership stereotypes and gender differences in the definition of career success stand in the way, according to Ms. Graves.

The percent of women officers in America’s 500 largest companies has slowly increased to 15.7 percent in Catalyst’s 2002 census. But 86 percent of top-earning corporate officers were men and the pay gap between men and women has persisted — and worsened in 10 industries where women had the greatest number of managerial roles — even in the booming 1990s, said Nan S. Langowitz, director of the Center for Women’s Leadership at Babson College.

“If you ask women to make the tradeoffs of putting in the time required to be a senior manager but at less pay and with fewer role models of success, that’s a tough road and fewer may choose to go down it,” she said.

The situation has made many women decide to stay put.

“There is a definite trend of women not seeking ascension to higher roles,” said Teri L. Cavanagh, senior vice president and director of FleetBoston Financial Corp.’s Women Entrepreneurs’ Connection.

“They are deciding that given family responsibilities, this is an OK place for me. I don’t want to aspire higher. I like my job; it has a sense of managerial authority and I can manage it, make a decent salary and not have to stress myself out more than I need,” she said.

Still others are getting off someone else’s corporate ladder altogether. From 1997 to 2002, the number of privately held majority or 50 percent women-owned businesses grew by 11 percent, more than 112 times the rate of all privately held firms, according to the Center for Women’s Business Research. Almost a third of private firms in Massachusetts are women-owned.

“I’m feisty and speak my mind. That doesn’t always work well in a large corporation,” said Shari L.S. Worthington of Worcester, who grew frustrated in her product marketing job with a large North Shore technology company and in 1987 formed Worcester-based Telesian Technology.

“When you are in your 20s and single, you can put in 80 hours at the office. But once you have a family, it becomes an issue: I wanted to see my daughter,” said Ms. Worthington, who like each of her 10 employees works from a home office. Telesian provides marketing, Web development and e-business services for technology and manufacturing clients globally.

Entrepreneurship opened another door for Kim Corwin, too.

Initially pursuing “a lot of money,” she decided she wanted to be closer to home after her son, Will, was born because “I felt I wasn’t doing either part of my life justice.”

She formed New Leaf Financial Counseling in Northboro in 2001 to help people struggling with money problems get their finances under control and cope with the emotional issues around money. “I wanted to find a way to feel I was making more of a contribution,” Ms. Corwin said.

While more and better-educated women are fueling growth in the labor pool and forming businesses that add to the state’s economic vitality, Mr. Sum warns that gender gaps don’t bode well for the future of marriage.

Patterns in recent decades show women, in particular, tend not to marry men with considerably less formal education, he said. If that continues, women will have fewer potential mates to choose from.

Americans already marry less than in the past. From 1970 to 2000, the annual number of marriages fell 39 percent, as more people delayed marriage until they were older and lived together outside marriage, according to the National Marriage Project’s “The State of Our Unions.”

And as fertility rates have fallen, children are less a part of American home life. Just one-third of U.S. households had children under 18 in 2000, down from nearly half in 1960. Divorce rates, meanwhile, which reached a high in 1980, have declined but are still twice as high as in 1960.

Patricia Stepanski Plouffe, president of Career Management Consultants in Worcester, points out that in the past “there was a push to marry for status. The man worked; the woman had her role. Together, they functioned well. …

“From a societal view, it worked. But as women went into the work force, the need to marry for status and money were no longer the sole reasons.”

People now, Ms. Plouffe said, are getting married for partnerships, long-range goals and sharing their lives in a different way, including work. “They become team players on a different kind of team. That has greatly affected choices in whom you marry, whether you marry and whether you stay married.”

Gina M. Betti, associate director of the Collaborative for Entrepreneurship & Innovation at WPI, said her 17-year-old daughter has a per-
‘She’s really smart – I like that’
Where girls and science blend

By Andi Esposito
BUSINESS EDITOR

WORCESTER — In the first class of the day, a fluid, entrepreneurial science exercise in which students are supposed to figure out how a motion detector works, three girls noodle over a new Dell laptop.

“We have a problem,” one says.

The laptop hasn’t been loaded with the software needed for their task.

Science teacher Jacklyn Bonneau suggests that while they wait for the software, the students open their college-level physics textbooks, get out calculators and tackle some problems.

About 20 minutes later, the girls figure out that the detector will only record movement within 5 meters, but seem discouraged it took so long to figure it out. “It’s too early in the morning,” one sighed.

The girls are juniors at the Massachusetts Academy of Mathematics and Science in Worcester, a state-funded public high school. Their class consists of 24 girls and 24 boys — the first time since the school’s founding in 1995 that any class has had as many girls as boys.

The school takes exceptional students in math and science and nurtures them through the 11th and 12th grade — in hope that they will fuel the pipeline of engineers and scientists critical to the nation’s economy. The academy’s Principal Rob Traver. The absence of a jock culture allows other values to be embraced, he said.

Creative problem-solving and teamwork, small classes, instructional intervention to ensure girls are as engaged as boys, and women role models as teachers help attract and retain girls.

“It’s a culture that is affirming of the intellect, and a sensitivity to the world, all of which is healthy but may be especially healthy for girls,” he said.

In a place where there are no geeks and nerds, or where everyone is a geek or nerd, he said, social relations are redefined.

“You won’t see the traditional boy-girl culture,” he said.

In place where there are no geeks and nerds, or where everyone is a geek or nerd, he said, social relations are redefined.

She’s really smart — I like that.’ Courting starts in a very different place.”

Dressed in T-shirts, sweatshirts and jeans, multiple piercings in some ears, the girls on the team in Ms. Bonneau’s physics class came from high schools where they grew restless after they used up what was available academically.

“I slept through my classes at my old school,” said Erin E. McLaughlin of Douglas, who plans to major in physics. “When I said I wanted to go into physics, they looked at me like I had three heads.”

While there’s more work at the academy than at her old high school, she said, “It doesn’t seem like a lot. It’s fun work, not busywork. You are learning all the time.”

Sarah J.A. McLeod, who wants to be an astrophysicist, said she was “never challenged in math and science. I would always be bored. In Millbury, everyone was on the same page. It was all book work. Here it’s hands-on.”

Jennifer J. Kowaloff, a former Bancroft School student who hopes to be an engineer, said she was attracted by the science program at the academy and likes the flexibility.

“It’s easier to talk to teachers,” she said. “They are more willing to help you succeed.”

Each plans to go to college and graduate school, and perhaps into research. Ms. McLeod believes they will find a welcome climate when they are ready to work.

“My dad has told me that women in hard science are being sought after and hired,” she said.
By Lisa Eckelbecker

TELEGRAM & GAZETTE STAFF

HOPKINTON — The equations written by Bunker Hill Community College professor Herbert I. Gross project upward onto a white screen in an EMC Corp. conference room.

There’s algebra, and as Mr. Gross writes, about 30 teachers on their summer vacation scribble along. Some step up to the overhead projector to write their answers to the equations. And after each proof, the other teachers clap.

The lesson in August was the sort of event that feels light years from real-world classrooms, but it’s one that high-technology employers such as EMC are pushing as they look years into the future and wonder who will work at their companies.

They have good reason to ask. Older men are dropping out of the labor force. Younger men are graduating from high school and going to college in lesser numbers than young women. And young women are less interested in science, engineering and information technology than their male peers.

For a slow-growing state with an economy dependent on brain power, the trends are disturbing, some economists and work force experts say.

“We’re in a constant battle for talent,” said John R. Schneider, director of programs and operations at MassINC, the Massachusetts Institute for a New Commonwealth, an economic research and advocacy organization. “It’s imperative that we get serious about the ongoing work force development challenges that the region faces.”

Preparing tomorrow’s workers is a question numerous Massachusetts trade groups, companies, community organizations and government officials are considering.

And the demographic back-drop is difficult. Massachusetts is barely growing. From 1990 to 2000, the number of people 16 and older — those who could be workers in the state — grew about 4 percent, by 200,469 people, to 5 million people.

Nationally, the number of working-age people rose about 13 percent during the same period.

The population of North Carolina, one of Massachusetts’ competitors for industry, grew 17 percent over that decade to nearly 6.3 million.

Meanwhile, the state’s labor force lost about 76,000 men age 16 and older, according to the Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University.

“In the 1990s, we had very little labor force growth in the state,” said Andrew M. Sum, economics professor and director of the Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University. “Part of that is that men left the labor force.”

Thousands of Massachusetts residents also moved out of the state during the 1990s. In 2001, more than 20,000 people moved out.

A MassINC study suggested that many of those leaving were young, college-educated workers. Thousands of immigrants arrived in their place.

Some were highly educated workers recruited to work in high technology, but many immigrants possessed little education and limited work skills, according to the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative.

The Worcester Partnership for Adult and Community Education recently estimated that 23.4 percent of Worcester’s residents lack a high school diploma. Meanwhile, about 1,700 people in the city remain on waiting lists for English, basic education and General Education Development degree classes.

And although high-school dropout rates have remained fairly low and steady in Massachusetts, gender and subject issues persist.

Over the last five years, the projected four-year high-school dropout rates for males in Massachusetts were about 36 percent higher than the rates for female students, according to state studies. Female students were 12 percent more likely to plan to go to college than male students.

But female students are still less likely to consider science, engineering and information technology majors in college, according to research by John H. Hodgman at the University of Massachusetts at Lowell.

“There are more girls that are pursuing the higher education path, but they’re not necessarily pursuing it, or as much, in the fields that our technology talent is required,” Mr. Hodgman said.

All of the trends could bode ill, because as baby boomers retire from work, they will leave behind smaller generations of young workers.

The national economy will need an estimated 18 million new individuals with education beyond high school by 2020, but the most optimistic forecasts suggest that only an additional 3 million will come from existing ranks of young people, said Brian Bosworth, president of FutureWorks, an Arlington-based research firm.

“We can’t solve the problem of producing high-skill workers by reliance on traditional methods of hoping that high school graduates will do better, go to college and get a degree,” Mr. Bosworth said. “It just won’t work.”

It may seem odd to anguish over the future work force when the state unemployment rate sits at 5.6 percent and an estimated 193,400 people remain unemployed. Over the last three years, Massachusetts has lost about 76,000 jobs, according to the state Department of Employment and Training.

But some experts say that the worker shortages of the 1990s — when Massachusetts employers bemoaned a dearth of workers with particular skills — will return as the economy recov-
Dropouts may undermine state's economy

ers. Even the beleaguered manufacturing sector has added a small number of jobs in recent weeks.

The wide-ranging challenge thus becomes to keep kids in school, get them into some kind of training or education after high school, and train and retrain existing workers.

“In a sense, we really have to grow our own labor force,” said Jerry Rubin, vice president for building economic opportunities with Jobs for the Future, a nonprofit education and training organization in Boston. “For Massachusetts and New England in particular, the education and skills premium is particularly critical because we don’t really have the ability to bring lots of skilled workers in from other parts of the country.”

Donna M. Griffin might help with that. She attended EMC’s summer Math Institute last year so she could learn how to better teach math at Worcester’s Midland Street School.

“If we don’t get them the right foundation, the right base from which to launch themselves, they’re not going to launch themselves to anywhere,” Mrs. Griffin said of her pupils.

At the other end of the spectrum are people who wonder how to keep older men in the labor force, even those who may lack skills or education needed for new industries.

“We don’t want to be in a situation where we’re losing potentially productive people ... because we haven’t given them the ongoing education and training they need to adapt to changes in the economy,” said Andre Mayer, senior vice president of research and communications for Associated Industries of Massachusetts, a manufacturers’ trade group.

Studies suggest that workers view job training as a way to get a job and then advance. But the job training network is a labyrinth of government programs, community organizations, colleges, employers and industry groups, all with different goals.

State-funded career centers aim to get people hired and working, while community colleges traditionally focus on career advancement, said Shaw M. Rosen, executive director of the Merrimack Valley Workforce Investment Board. His organization has helped find training alternatives for the thousands of workers laid off by Lucent Technologies.

“Most of the challenge has come from different cultures, and just perhaps a lack of understanding between the ‘silos’ of each others’ priorities and requirements,” Ms. Rosen said.

Well-intentioned efforts also falter when the economy shifts. The Massachusetts Software Council abandoned programs aimed at retraining workers for technology jobs and for information technology jobs in biotech when openings dried up.

Other problems concern money. The state’s fiscal crisis led to funding cuts of about 4.5 percent for the 15 Massachusetts community colleges this fiscal year, which has dismayed job-training specialists.

Yet a recent initiative called BEST — Building Essential Skills through Training — has some training experts hopeful.

About the series ...

Men Not Working, a five-day series by the Telegram & Gazette business news staff, is based on research led by economist Andrew M. Sum, professor of economics and director of the Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University.

Sunday: Over the past decade, men have been disappearing from the Massachusetts labor force, a situation that bodes ill for the future. By business reporter Lisa Eckelbecker.

Monday: In an uncertain economy, older workers like former Westboro resident Timothy C. Beers are being left behind. By business reporter Bob Kierva.

Tuesday: Labor experts fear that young men who lack college degrees or the focus to pursue a career are most likely to be jobless or underemployed. By business reporter Jim Bodor.

Yesterday: As men disappear from the working ranks, women shoulder the growth in the state’s labor force and crowd into college classrooms. By business editor Andi Esposito.

Today: Employers, trade groups, government officials and community organizations look for answers to work-force development. By business reporter Lisa Eckelbecker.

Telegram & Gazette city editor Jay Whearley edited the series. Chief librarian George Labonte provided additional research.

Using a variety of public funds, industry groups and community colleges have teamed up to train workers for critical jobs.

Bob McIntosh, left, technology training co-ordinator, leads Jim J. Harvey of Spencer through a practice job interview. Mr. Harvey had just finished a 160-hour computer training course through Experience Works at Workforce Central in Worcester.

The Massachusetts Biotechnology Council is working with Middlesex Community College and Roxbury Community College to train biotech workers for biomanufacturing, a field likely to boom as more biotech companies win approval for their drugs.

The classes, lasting four weeks, have included people age 28 to 55, some of whom had no education beyond a GED, said Cora Beth Abel, MBC director of education.

“A couple years ago, most of the companies in biomanufacturing couldn’t find enough qualified technicians,” Ms. Abel said. “One company was saying today they need to hire 80 technicians in one month.”

Other initial BEST programs have focused on generating health care, manufacturing and financial services workers.

Massachusetts has broken ground in work force education and training through programs such as BEST, experts say, but the state’s continuing challenge cannot be taken lightly.

“I think Massachusetts will always be an attractive place, because it’s always going to be a place where companies will find top talent” from private and public four-year colleges, said MassINC’s Mr. Schneider.

“Where we’re going to be at a disadvantage is when business makes decisions about expanding and manufacturing, and I think there, unless we continue to be serious about creating opportunities for workers to upgrade skills, then we may see our advantage slip away.”

John R. Schneider, director of programs and operations at the Massachusetts Institute For A New Commonwealth, an economic research and advocacy organization, said the state is in a “constant battle for talent.”