



Al Churchill doesn't let being 97 years old slow him down - he still reports for work five days a week at Magnetool in Troy, Mich., a company he founded and served as president for 60 years.

REGINA H. BOONE • MCT

## Working at 60? Try toiling at 90

1.2 million sign up for the benefits of less dementia and longer lives

BY ZLATI MEYER  
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DETROIT — Al Churchill's first car was a Model T. These days, he's driven to work in a 2012 Lincoln Navigator.

To work?

Yes, the 97-year-old Royal Oak, Mich., resident goes to his office every day — and has no plans to stop. Churchill owns Troy, Mich.-based Magnetool, a company he founded 60 years ago using training he got at the long-shuttered Henry Ford Trade School.

"It's more fun to work," he said. "Do I have a hobby? Yes, magnets."

Churchill is one of a handful of nonagenarians still earning paychecks full-time. The number of older Americans who choose to work later and later in life is growing. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1.2 million Americans age 75 or older were working last year, up from 787,000 in 2001.

"Some of these young people, kids, have a lot more vitality. They can work longer hours than I can, but ... all I can do is bring my own experience," said Robert Halperin, 90, a loan officer at John Adams Mortgage in Southfield, Mich. "It's important for people to realize they can keep productive for a long time. They don't have to sit on the stoop and rock."

Numerous studies have shown that staying on the job later in life has numerous advantages, such as decreased dementia, longer lifespan and greater happiness, according to Cathy Ly-sack, deputy director of Wayne State University's Institute of Gerontology, whose father, almost 80, is a full-time surgeon.

"There's a small portion of older adults who are amazingly great at what they do. They have the abilities to perform at a very high level

in late life, and it's meaningful for them to work. They're still rewarded," she said.

Dick McNeilly, 92, of Detroit agreed. He has worked in the membership office of the Better Business Bureau in Southfield for 35 years. Working "takes all my time," he said. "I don't want to have to sit around and watch TV. I plan to work as long as I can."

### 'This is a stimulant'

For the senior-senior set, having a sense of purpose, staying busy and keeping cognitive skills sharp are worth it.

"I have no real outside hobbies that would challenge me and keep my gray matter from disintegrating too quickly, because it does go downhill after a certain age," said Halperin, formerly a homebuilder. "People I know who retired who had no real interests, they died earlier. This is a stimulant for me."

That's why, at 87, he decided to take the loan officer licensing exam. "It's a sense of accomplishment," Halperin said. "They don't want to be a burden on society, so they work. People at these ages, 75 and above, are younger than they used to be."

Employers see the benefits, too. Halperin "brings a ton of experience," said Larry Bsharah, president of John Adams Mortgage. "He's still very productive, and he brings a lot of joy to people here. People love speaking to him. He's got a ton of stories."

Churchill won't quit anytime soon.

"It's necessary for people to do or something they think is important to do," he said about his fellow "oldest old" Americans. "If I didn't work? There's no such thing. ... Work is important because, without work, you're nothing."