P.S. to the NEWS
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RETIREMENT PLANS

The passage of the 1974 Pension Law has focused attention on the problems of our senior citizens. And rightly so. It is good that workers will now be guaranteed against loss of the pensions they have paid for.

Since the passage of the Social Security Act, retirement at age 65 has generally become mandatory throughout the business world. Some companies enforce an even earlier retirement, down to age 60. Social Security has conditioned us to believe that everyone is on the shelf at age 65. The psychological effect reaches even farther. Ten years before retirement, many people start to coast downhill because they think it isn't worth trying to climb any more.

With the average age of our population going up every year because of the decline in our birth rate, and with the advances in medical science that have extended our lifespan, and with the shrinking number of young workers available to carry Social Security and other pension plans on their backs, it is time that we do some innovative thinking about the productive potential of people over 65.

When we compare the business world with the entertainment world where there is no mandatory retirement age, men and women over 65 seem to retain their youthful appearance and their stamina. Among those who work a 12- to 14-hour day, on an energetic schedule that would be a grind at any age, are Jack Benny at 80, Bob Hope at 71, Henry Fonda at 69, John Wayne at 67, Lawrence Welk at 71, Helen

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Hayes at 73, and Gloria Swanson at 74.

Surgery and cosmetics may hide the wrinkles, but a continuing capacity for hard work seems to come primarily from a stay-young attitude toward life and a commitment to work instead of to retirement. Some who tried retirement, such as Robert Young and Fred Astaire, are glad to have retired from the boredom of retirement and stepped back -- at ages 67 and 74, respectively -- into the harness of hard work. Both men said retirement was the most miserable period of their lives.

Jack Benny, who has been saying he is 39 for the last 40 years because he considers that to be the "maximum age of youth," said recently, "I actually do feel I'm 39 years old -- and that feeling is what's kept me young." Bob Hope, who puts in a 16-hour day when he is doing a tour, thinks it is important to "walk tall" and keep your posture up. James Cagney, in his seventies, tap dances every day and thinks we should all "work out enough to get out of breath two or three times a day." Buddy Ebsen at 65 is an active skier and says "retirement represents the pinnacle of boredom." Mae West credits her vitality to good living and good food, doesn't smoke or drink, and at age 82 works out with an exercise bicycle and walking machine.

It is possible that we would be doing more for the health and happiness of our senior citizens if we offered them the opportunity to continue in gainful employment rather than compel them to accept mandatory retirement on a pension in dollars that buy less and less every year.

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