

## **In the Spotlight: On Labor Day, know that nation's jobs problem must be solved locally**

By John F. Gilligan

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How do you determine the value of a house? "Location, location, location."

How about life itself? What determines its quality? Is there an adage that says it all? Here's one: "A job, a job, a job."

Two things to keep in mind: First, a house does not make a home. One can live in a shack with a loving, caring, supportive family and the quality of that home will be priceless. Second, we usually associate a pay stub with a job, but being paid does not make a job. Stay-at-home moms or dads have a job rearing and educating their children. Volunteers, including retirees, have a job building and improving the quality of life in their communities.

What counts is that whatever the job, it's how we do it that determines our character. Do it sloppily and sloppy we become. In the end, we are what we do.

The tragedy in America is that too many Americans are without a job. Yes, the national employment numbers have fallen from a 2009 high of 10 percent to 6.2 percent today (Illinois is at 6.8 percent). Economists use euphemisms such as "slack" in the labor force and employers refer to those who have been out of work for seven months or more as "damaged goods." But this "slack" represents 9.7 million Americans, more than the combined populations of Indiana and Iowa. It doesn't include the 2.2 million Americans who have stopped looking for work. And it overlooks the 7.5 million who have been forced to take part-time work for financial survival.

When one is unemployed or underemployed, bad things often follow: depression, domestic violence, suicide, drug and alcohol abuse, divorce, etc. Communities with unemployment rates above 10 percent become tinderboxes for violence.

The last piece of data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics is that 3.4 million youth, ages 16-24, are out of school and out of work. This has wicked consequences. It breeds an alienated, disaffected population of citizens. These are virtually the last years before the

character cement of one's life hardens. It's usually the final opportunity to forge the self-discipline and ambition and to acquire the knowledge and skills for a productive life. Without these habits, a life on the street or in jail quickly follows.

What's the solution? Don't expect the president or Congress, governor or Legislature to solve it. They haven't in the past, and won't in the future. Most of their well-intentioned policies to help the poor and unemployed result in creating more unemployment and less incentive to seek work. These are complex issues, best resolved by creative solutions at the community level with state and federal support, not the other way around.

On Labor Day we celebrate the America that we have built by working together. It's a good reminder that by working together locally, we can solve our job problem.

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