

On The Shady Side

By Hap Hansen

The Haves and the Have Nots. They were with us yesterday, are with us today and will be with us tomorrow. No matter how much Have Nots progress up the economic ladder, some Haves are already on the top rung, looking down with disdain upon the struggling masses. An economic gap has existed between the two since George Washington's picture was placed on the dollar bill. These differences have always been an accepted reality, even as the Have Nots looked upward with hope and sometimes inspiration to achieve their place in the Haves' world of plenty. Unfortunately, fewer and fewer of the Have Nots are successfully climbing the success and achievement ladder. They continue to remain in the shadows of businesses. Slippery rungs become treacherous with the onset of a growing job skills gap. Not enough young people are completing education requirements in order to handle increasingly technical job skills.

Those jobs that do not demand advanced training are shrinking in number. Only so many hamburger flippers are needed in our society and when those and other relatively unskilled jobs are filled, there's nowhere else to go, except into the shadows of life. What can we do to solve this enormous economic and social problem? Even political solutions seem to be elusive.

However, a two-pronged attack seems most likely to succeed, with enormous financial commitments required of both business and government. First, we must consider making mandatory a law now existing in many states that requires students to graduate high school with demonstrable job skills or they cannot continue to have a driver's license. No shadows here! This course of action could virtually eliminate high-school drop-outs who try to enter the workforce with no skills, minimal ability and little ambition. This action would be the government's responsibility.

Second, we need massive retraining projects to get usable job skills injected into older, unskilled workers to make them more productive in an enormously competitive world.

Training will increase productivity, which will raise living standards and allow us to compete more effectively in international markets. The action is businesses' responsibility. Businesses need to come out of the shadows to handle these problems. We have a choice. Educate and train, or see a further erosion in living standards. Let's make the wisest choice.