

**FROM ONE GENERATION  
OF MAKERS TO THE NEXT:**

**HOW TO ENSURE YOUR BUSINESS  
HAS THE SKILLED WORKERS IT NEEDS**



## HAVE YOU RETAINED WORKERS FOR MANY YEARS? DO YOU VALUE YOUR WORKERS OF ALL AGES?

**Apply for the 2015 Age Smart Employer Awards  
at [AgeSmartEmployer.org](http://AgeSmartEmployer.org). Last year's winners received much publicity  
and one was invited to the White House.**

The Age Smart Employer Awards—an initiative of the Robert N. Butler Columbia Aging Center and The New York Academy of Medicine, funded by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation— addresses the needs of both businesses and older workers by:

- Researching best practices of NYC employers, especially small businesses
- Honoring employers who value workers of all ages through an awards program
- Supporting businesses interested in hiring and retaining older workers



# FROM ONE GENERATION OF MAKERS TO THE NEXT: HOW TO ENSURE YOUR BUSINESS HAS THE SKILLED WORKERS IT NEEDS

Skilled trades and manufacturing businesses are New York City's makers, builders and problem solvers. They bake our bread, tailor our clothing, craft our diamonds, build our homes and offices and keep them heated, lit and safe. Many owners of these industrial businesses – which employ 14% of all private-sector workers in NYC – say that finding qualified workers is their greatest staffing challenge and that jobs often remain unfilled. Others expect most of their workers to retire in the next decade.

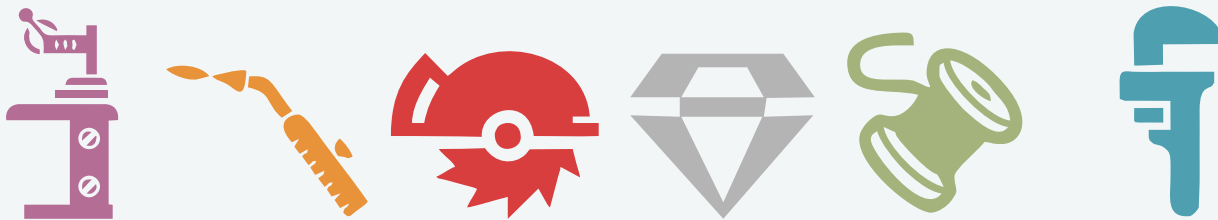
The average manufacturing worker in the U.S. is 56 years old.

(NYCEDC report)

If workers retire as expected, economists predict a shortfall of 10 million skilled manufacturing workers by 2020.

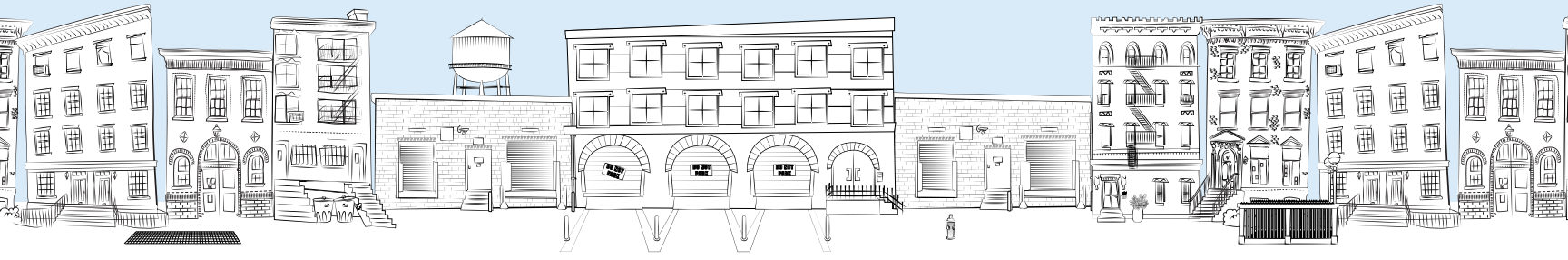
(The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics).

NYC IS ALREADY FACING A SHORTAGE OF  
QUALIFIED PEOPLE IN THESE AREAS:



machine operators, welders, carpenters, jewelers, tailors and plumbers

The Age Smart Employer Awards team listened to 100+ small NYC businesses (the majority of industrial businesses are small). They shared their struggles and solutions for keeping their current skilled workers longer and how to transfer their expertise to the next generation.



# 10 TIPS FROM NYC SMALL BUSINESSES TO RETAIN AND TRAIN INDUSTRIAL WORKERS

The 100+ small NYC businesses we spoke with shared their best strategies.

1

## Focus on retaining valuable workers as much as on finding new talent.

Many successful NYC manufacturers keep workers for decades, often for their whole work lives. Businesses concerned with a skills shortage worry about where new workers will come from. But businesses successfully handling the shortage are also developing strategies to keep their current valuable, skilled workers around for as long as possible.

**Architectural Grille** (Gowanus) manufactures high quality architectural metalwork. Owner Steve Giumenta says, “You can’t discount the experience an older worker brings that to the table. Not only in the product, but in the employee and how a lot can be learned from them. Skills, morale, tricks of the trade. Older workers are just like on any sports team when the veteran on the squad has the knowledge, morale and leadership. The young kid sees an old guy who has been here for 20 years, and it shows there is longevity and a possible career.”

### PENN & FLETCHER

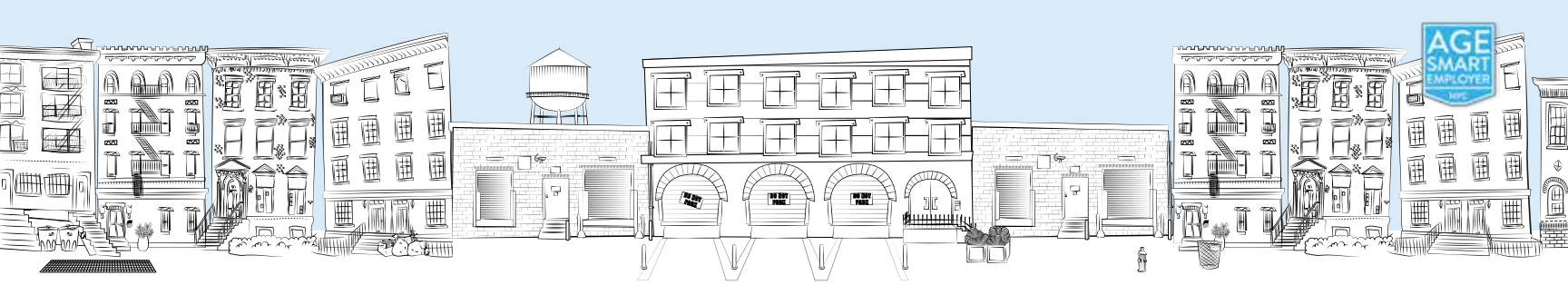
(Long Island City)

*“We are open to new talent, but no one has knocked on the door, and certainly we have tried. Most people don’t trust manual skills so they don’t go into work with their hands.”*

- Ernie Smith, Owner

Penn & Fletcher embroiders high-end furniture and clothing. Only two of their 12 workers are under age 50, and they have no idea how workers will be replaced when they retire. Ernie has willed the company to his workers.





## 2 Create a “Family” Environment

Owners frequently said creating a “family” environment is why their workers stay.

- At **M&S Schmalberg** (Fashion District), a century-old fabric flower manufacturer, they’ve hired 2nd generation employees. Lucia was hired after spending time at the studio as a child with her mother. Now she is one of their most valued employees. “Lucia grew up in the business. She has more of an understanding of the business than anyone,” says owner Adam Brand. “She has an awareness of what’s going on. She’s easily the most valuable person here.”
- At **Bridge Cleaners & Tailors** (Brooklyn), co-owner Richard Aviles says, “Every tailor here comes from a different country. Many of them have been offered to make more somewhere else, but they stay because they feel at home here. We’re running less of a business and more of a family. Everyday for lunch, someone cooks a large dish and they all share it for lunch.
- When one tailor’s house burnt down, everyone chipped in clothes, food and money. And my mama is everyone’s mama.”
- At **Amy’s Bread** (Long Island City) they make sure to celebrate birthdays and special occasions and offer a good work life balance. Bread bakers work a 40-hour work week, unlike other bakeries which demand more. Owner Amy Scherber says, “Part of it is to treat the employees very well and have it be a great place to work – trying to consistently respect everybody and take care of them, recognize their special occasions, give them raises every year, have a nice environment to work in, reasonable hours and balance, and pride in their product. All that stuff makes people happy and makes them feel really proud of staying with a company.”





# 3

## Modify work assignments or environments as workers age

### BUILD IT GREEN! NYC

(Astoria)

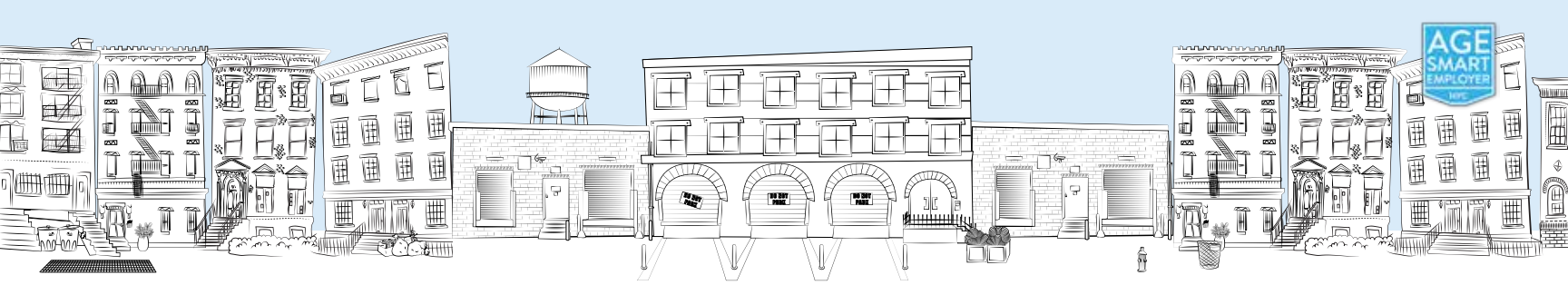
*“What happens if we are around in 20 years and our staff is all older? How do you make the job not as physically demanding? We have some guys from prison re-entry programs who are in their 40s, and they’re working the warehouse. What happens if they’ve been here 5 years and if they’re here another 5 years? How do we adjust the job?”*

- Justin Green, Founder

Build it Green! NYC is a non-profit social enterprise retail outlet for salvaged and surplus building materials, Justin has not found a solution to address the toll the job takes on their workers’ bodies.

- **Rosenwach Tank** (Long Island City), a 148-year-old water tank company, may move aging workers to an inspector role once they can no longer do the manual work of building water towers.
- **S. Katzman Produce** (Hunts Point Terminal Market) has older workers building sample racks, rather than moving produce.
- At a larger factory **Brooks Brothers** (Long Island City), took a valued older worker out of the production line and changed her role to custom alterations
- At the **Bridge Cleaners & Tailors** production facility in the Brooklyn Navy Yard, they have moved clothing closer to people’s stations and structured the space so they do not have to go up and down the stairs. They also have fatigue mats and comfortable chairs for all workers.





## 4 Value Mixed-Age Teams

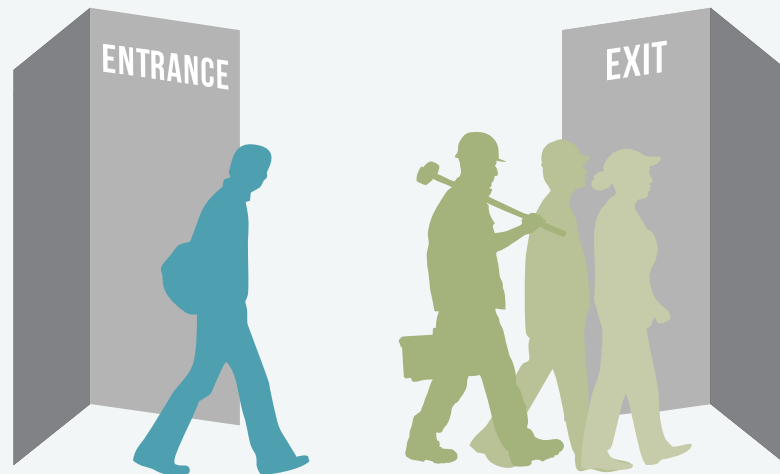
Many businesses use mixed-age teams to transfer knowledge and allow workers to train each other.

- At **B & D Heating** (Gowanus), one of the most valuable workers is 79-years-old. “He’s head strong, stubborn and brilliant,” said owner Bill Munks. “He can work here as long as he’d like. He’s the strongest guy in the shop. I hire a special guy who goes with him and treats him like a father...They are a great pair.”
  - At **M&S Schmalberg** (Garment District), a flower manufacturer, Adam, 31, teaches his father how to use social media to increase their brand’s exposure, while Warren, 56, teaches his son the craft of fabric flower making using century-old techniques.
- Several businesses and workers spoke of incidents where machines broke or could not handle a particular job and older workers could rely on the back-up knowledge of being able to do something manually. “Younger people want to Google how to use a hammer,” said one construction worker.
- A cabinet maker in his 70s said that younger workers on jobs regularly volunteer to carry heavy loads for him. In exchange, he teaches them woodworking skills and how to be time-efficient when in a rush. A flooring contractor in his 20s spoke of trying to absorb everything from older workers assigned to jobs at the same time.





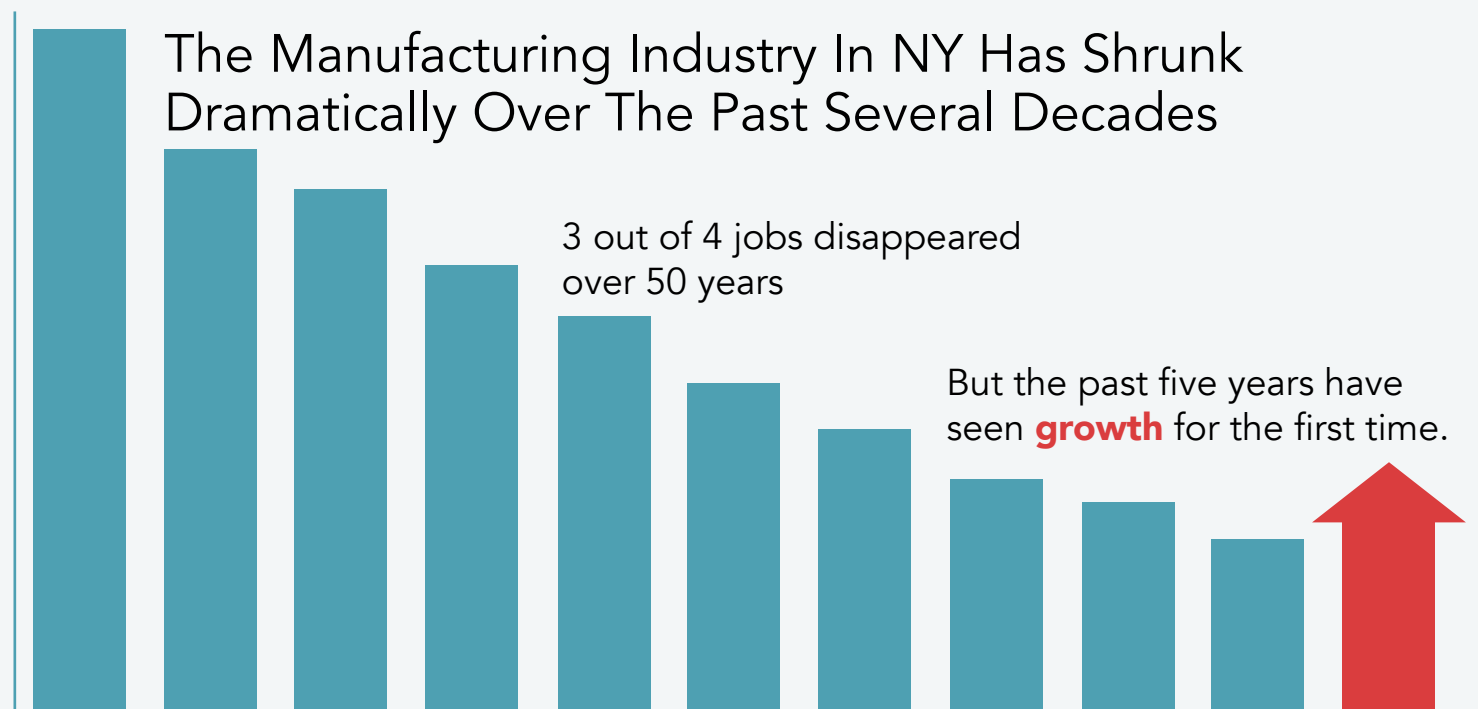
# MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY INFORMATION



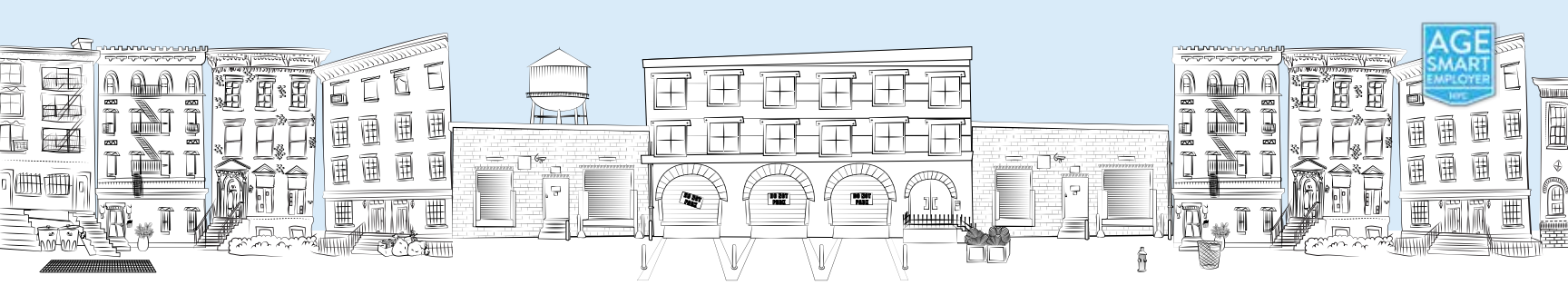
Only **One** Skilled Trade Worker Is Entering The Workforce  
For Every **Three** That Are Retiring Or Leaving  
(U.S. Department of Commerce).

## THE MAJORITY OF MANUFACTURING FIRMS

The Manufacturing Industry In NY Has Shrunk Dramatically Over The Past Several Decades

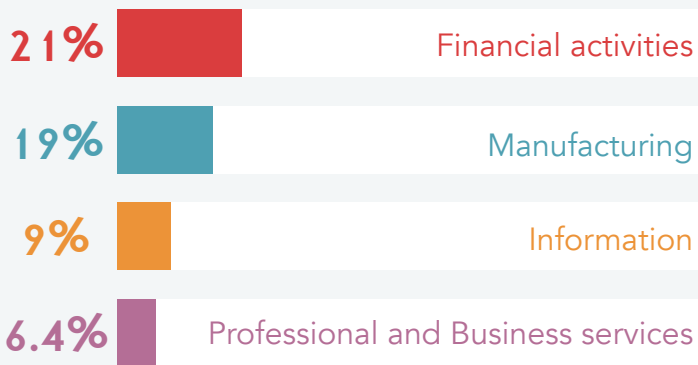






# MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY INFORMATION

IN 2014, NEW YORK STATE MANUFACTURING WAGES HAD THE **SECOND-FASTEST** GAIN OF ANY INDUSTRY



With the average manufacturing worker in NYS making **\$57,000**

FOOD MANUFACTURING HAS SEEN THE **HIGHEST GROWTH** IN NEW YORK OVER THE PAST THREE YEARS.



Bakeries and tortilla manufacturing account for about **2/3**



## IN NYC HAVE FEWER THAN 10 EMPLOYEES

**600,000+** jobs have been added in the manufacturing industry in the U.S. in the last four years.



More **expansion** is projected as companies expand operations as the economy improves or relocate jobs from overseas. (The Manufacturing Institute).



## 5 Develop an internal pipeline that leads to skilled workers:

Industrial businesses are beginning to realize that the sustainability of their work depends on reviving the apprentice system.

Elizabeth Luskin of the Long Island City Partnership explained that, “Many of these skilled workers started in the front end of the work and then moved to the highest skill end and that was a 10-year apprenticeship. You can’t just make those people overnight.”

- **Steinway & Sons** (Astoria) starts workers as floor sweepers, usually hiring through employee recommendation, and invests in them and moves them through various positions over several decades. “We have a skills pyramid within the factory. There are more people at the base. They are sweeping floors, cutting grass. And then many, as they have advanced through the years, are now at the top of the pyramid. Because we have that pyramid, there are people ready to move up the level,” said Anthony Gilroy, Director of Communications at Steinway & Sons.
- **Rosenwach Tank** (Long Island City) pairs more experienced workers with new workers through an informal apprentice system.
- **Riva Precision Jewelry** (Sunset Park) is considering creating a role of “trainer” for older workers who would otherwise retire and who want to leave the daily production line. The company already pays incentives to workers who train others, to replace incentives they would otherwise get for high production.





## 6 Capture valuable skills and knowledge before and after people retire

- At **Little Wolf Cabinet Shop** (Upper East Side), when one of his most skilled workers decided to retire, owner John Wolf, Sr. knew it was important that one of his most skilled workers, age 70, passed on what he knew to the next generation - to John Wolf, Jr. “This guy was a wonderful craftsman. He told me he wanted to retire. I said, ‘No, David, you’ve got one more year to go. Now you have to teach my son. All you have to do for the year is teach him.’ Now my son is a wonderful cabinetmaker, too.”
- At **International Asbestos Removal** (Flushing), Anthony, who recently retired and is in his 80s, has worked with the owners through two generations of their family and still participates in weekly staff meetings. “He knew everyone in the city. Everybody knew him. He was the steady hand, the consistent force between management changes,” owner Karen Grando said.

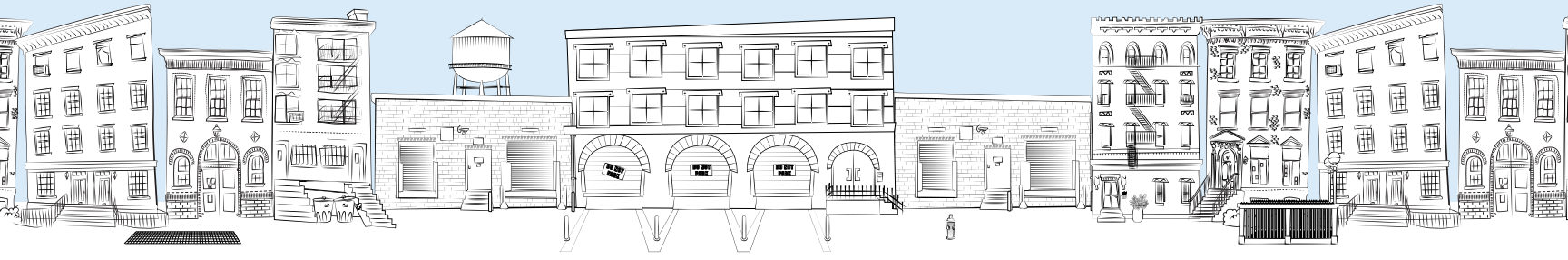
### 47TH ST DIAMOND DISTRICT BID

*“People aging out of the profession, and there not being another generation of people to take the profession on is certainly an issue. There are professions that exist here that don’t exist anywhere else in America. People don’t know what a girdler is or a brillianteer.”*

- Michael Gumet, head of the BID

The businesses in the 47th St Diamond District BID employ over 22,000 workers.





# 7

## Look for transferable skills and experience in hiring

In industrial work, older workers often also have more realistic expectations of what a work environment will be like.

Older workers stay in jobs longer. In 2014, the median tenure of workers ages 55 to 64 in all industries (10.4 years) was more than three times that of workers ages 25 to 34 years (3.0 years). (The US Bureau of Labor Statistics).

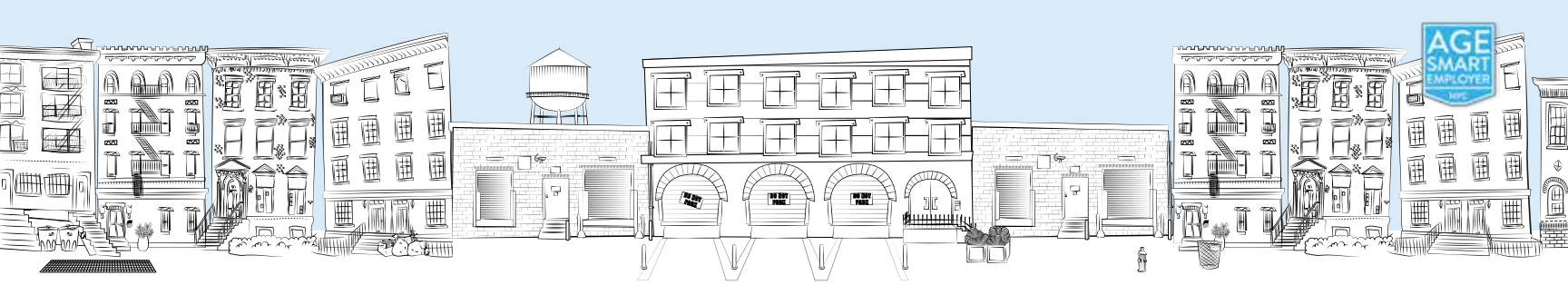
Successful businesses have found ways to identify transferable skills in talented workers who have spent many years in another field.

- **Nathel and Nathel** (Hunts Point), a produce wholesaler, hired a 68-year-old worker who had been a buyer in the Hunts Point Terminal Market for 35 years. “He worked at night, 12-14 hours,” said Ira Nathel. “At a certain point you don’t want to do that anymore.” He now brings his expertise of the industry to Nathel & Nathel’s sales office.

- **The Southwest Brooklyn Industrial Development Corporation’s** (Sunset Park/Gowanus/Red Hook) workforce development program recently placed a former paralegal in a labor position as a scale operator because of his attention to detail and ability to do math. They also placed a retired hotel cook as a delivery driver for a company that brings produce from local farms to CSAs, because he understood food handling.

“A business should look at older workers with long careers to see if there is a link to what they do in a totally new way because they are so valuable,” said Justin Collins, head of workforce development at SBIDC.





## 8

# Prevent others from stealing valued workers by offering competitive pay and benefits.

Many small manufacturers use union workers and provide full benefits. Others have found offering full benefits to be too costly, but have found that offering competitive pay and at least some benefits helps to retain employees.

- **International Asbestos Removal** (Flushing) offers a 401K plan and health insurance to their non-union staff.
- **Architectural Grille** (Gowanus) offers a full benefits package.
- **Ovenly** (Greenpoint), a retail and wholesale bakery, pays for 50% of workers' health insurance and reimburses for relevant trainings. "We are constantly asking our employees, how do you want to grow? What is the experience you want to gain from this," says co-owner Agatha Kulaga.

## B & D HEATING

(Gowanus)

*"I can't find anyone. I need men right now. Today. Right now I have plumbers doing heating."*

- Bill Munks, Owner

B & D Heating has been a vital part of Brooklyn for 35 years. Bill Has reached out to several trade schools and training programs but none have had workers to send him.

## 9

# Ask for and value employee input

One of the benefits of working for a small business is having easy access to senior management and the owner. Successful small businesses use this to their advantage.

- "We ask questions and listen to the input of our employees," says Ira Nathel, owner of **Nathel and Nathel** (Hunts Point Terminal Market). When the business was investing in new jacks, rather than just buy them, they asked their warehouse workers to test out alternatives and tell them which one they liked better."
- At **Bridge Cleaners & Tailors** (Brooklyn) production facility in the Brooklyn Navy Yard, workers collaboratively redesigned the plant following Hurricane Sandy and regularly suggest improvements to the work process. "90% of the changes we've made and ideas we've had have come from the ground floor," says co-owner Richard Aviles. The company bought a \$75,000 machine because their workers who had tested it at another company said it would improve their work output [productivity?].



## 10 Earn a reputation as innovative and adapting to the times

Workers want to work for a company that is thriving. Several businesses interviewed have pursued certifications and awards to advertise that they are well-known, growing, and forward-looking.

- **International Asbestos Removal** (Flushing) became certified as a woman-owned business. This certification helped them to gain access to lucrative government contracts, and signaled to employees and potential employees that the firm was thriving.
- **Globus Cork** (South Bronx) held a design contest for college students to attract interest in the company and product.
- At **Rosenwach Tank** (Long Island City), owners have consistently developed new ways to grow the business.  
  
In addition to water tanks, under their umbrella group Rosenwach Group, they now do everything from manufacturing evaporative cooling towers to restoring buildings and manufacturing outdoor furniture. The company also launched a line of clothing and products that say “We Tank NY.” They use the tagline “Paris has the Eiffel Tower. Italy has the Leaning Tower. New York has Rosenwach water towers.”



Photo Credit: Rosenwach Tank



## Thank you to the following people

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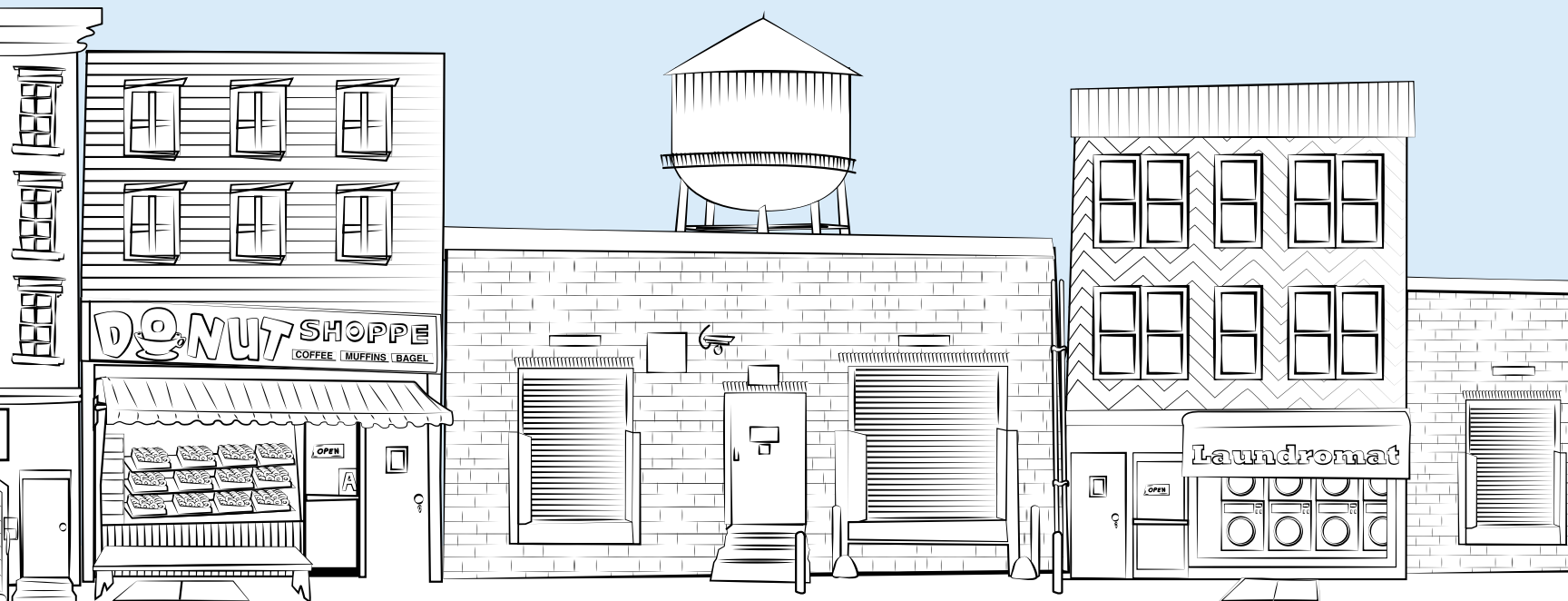
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