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## **THE REGISTER CITIZEN**

# Opinion: Help young people understand the work world

Bernadine Venditto

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A help wanted sign is posted on a restaurant.

Associated Press

More than 4.5 million people voluntarily quit their jobs in November, the U.S. Department of Labor reported this week. As of the last day of November, the Labor Department said, there were over 10 million job postings while only about 7 million Americans were looking for work.

Since November, with the spread of the new COVID variant, there have been even more job postings with not nearly enough job seekers.

The result: employer demand for workers remains high. Competition for workers continues to increase.

There is something businesses can do to help inspire and prepare young people for successful careers, so they can begin to fill these countless job vacancies. Help young people understand the work world. Help them prepare to enter that world.

Junior Achievement brings inspiring volunteers from the community into classrooms and community centers to deliver proven, experiential lessons on financial literacy, work readiness, and entrepreneurship that inspires and prepares students to understand opportunities for their futures.

For more than 100 years, Junior Achievement has prepared students with the skills and confidence to reach their professional and financial goals. This nonprofit organization remains committed to ensuring all K-12 graders have access to essential and life-changing experiences, especially in light of our nation's fast changing and complex economic landscape.

To continue our work, we need business leaders to join with Junior Achievement to help provide young people with opportunities, resources, and hope.

Along with financial contributions from the region's businesses, JA needs additional support. We need you. We need volunteers and role models from the business world to support our mission by discussing their own personal experiences and connecting with young people.

Overall, 99 percent of JA volunteers would recommend the experience to others. Two-thirds of JA alumni report they support the program as adults (66 percent) through volunteering time on boards or in classrooms, donating money, or working directly with JA staff, proving the value and the impact of the JA experience.

It is important to remind ourselves that even before the pandemic, employers were having a difficult time finding qualified workers. One of the most skilled generations in our nation has begun to move out of the workforce when there aren't similarly skilled younger workers prepared to take their place.

Jack E. Kosakowski, president and CEO of Junior Achievement USA, has stated, "... as a society, we need to do a better job of tying education to work and career outcomes so that we don't end up with such a significant disparity between people looking for jobs and jobs looking for people. This includes helping young people draw the connection between what they are learning in school and its application to success outside of the classroom. (And it means) putting them in contact with successful professionals in their communities who can serve as role

models to inspire them to be the next engineer, technician, educator, skilled tradesperson, or physician.”

Junior Achievement learning experiences do just that. National surveys of Junior Achievement alumni have shown that:

51 percent have college degrees, much higher than that nationwide average of 33 percent

82 percent say JA motivated them to succeed professionally

four in five credit Junior Achievement for influencing their decisions about further education, impacting their professional and personal development

Junior Achievement experiences offer a critical foundation for regional business desperately looking to fill vacancies. It is a way to show young people that there is a realistic path for them to follow. And it is a way for businesses to begin to prepare for the future by helping to build the workforce for the future.

*Bernadine Venditto is president of Bridgeport-based Junior Achievement of Greater Fairfield County. She can be reached at 203-382-0180 or [bvenditto@jagfc.org](mailto:bvenditto@jagfc.org).*