

Workplace tough on disabled

Handicapped individuals face many obstacles to finding supportive jobs

By Ann Belser

Physical disabilities, which can make working an extra challenge, make looking for work especially discouraging.

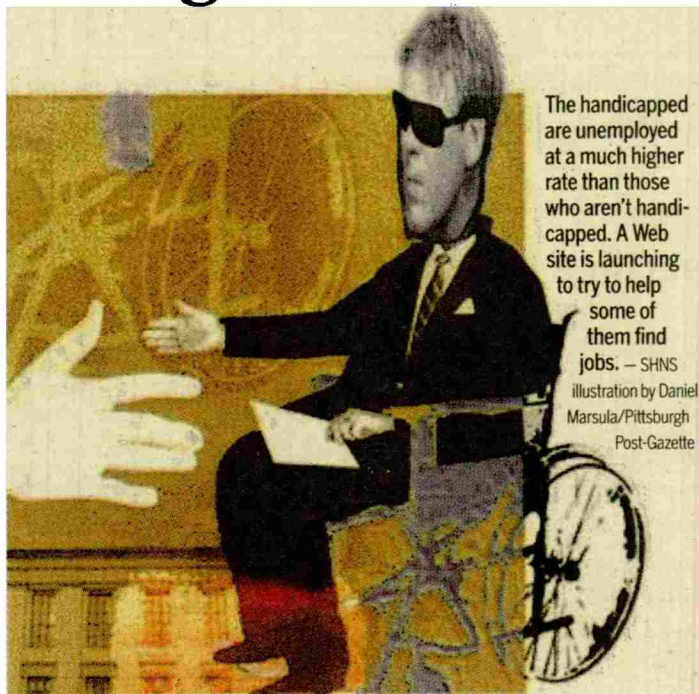
The statistics don't provide much reason to be optimistic:

In 2004, the number of adults who were 18 to 64 with a work limitation who were employed was 19.3 percent. And the number of people in the same category with incomes below the poverty line was 28.2 percent, according to statistics compiled by Cornell University researchers working with government figures.

Getting people with disabilities to work is both good for them and the companies that employ them, said Dana Egreczky, the vice president of work-force development for the New Jersey Chamber of Commerce and the president of a new job-search Web site for people with disabilities.

[Accessibleemployment.org](http://accessibleemployment.org) is a Web site that, though started in New Jersey, has gone national to link companies to potential employees who happen to have disabilities.

Egreczky said the chamber started the site because so many of its members were national companies that



The handicapped are unemployed at a much higher rate than those who aren't handicapped. A Web site is launching to try to help some of them find jobs. — SHNS

illustration by Daniel Marsula/Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

were seeking diversity among their employees and found they were lacking in employees with disabilities.

"A diverse work force helps you work and sell to a diverse customer base," Egreczky said. "There are many, many disabled folks who have high-level skills."

Egreczky said her research has shown there is a need for the site because there are currently 1.25 million Americans with disabilities who are looking for work.

Rick McWilliams, a program manager at the Pittsburgh-based Three Rivers Center for Independent Living, said the inability to get a job is not the barrier that keeps many people from working. McWilliams, 47, of Penn Hills, Pa., said many are afraid to give up federal health benefits and Social Security insurance.

"Sometimes they're afraid to work, they don't think they can do it," McWilliams said.

— Scripps Howard News Service

