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2020 Census workers needed from Lamorinda

By Vera Kochan

Since 1790, when the first United States census was conducted, every person living in the 50 states, District of Columbia and five United States territories (Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, U.S. Virgin Islands and Northern Mariana Islands) is constitutionally mandated to be accounted for to the U.S. Census Bureau. According to the Census Bureau, the nonpartisan agency requires that every household answer the short questionnaire accurately either by mail, phone or, for the first time in census history, online. The confidential information is essential in determining funding and services to communities. Every year, billions of dollars in federal funding are allocated to hospitals, roads, fire departments, schools and other resources based on the data collected.

For this year's census, the Bureau is lagging behind in recruiting applicants for the many positions available to help with the process. A national campaign was launched in October to recruit nearly 2.7 million job applicants for census takers, census field supervisors, recruiting assistants, clerks and office operations supervisors.

Moraga, the greater Lamorinda area, and the nation in general are enjoying a low unemployment rate. The need for a temporary job to pay the bills is not crucial. As such, the Census Bureau has attempted to change their recruitment strategy by offering "good pay" and "flexible hours" along with the chance to "help shape your community's future." (For information, visit www.2020census.gov/jobs.)

Another problem the Bureau is facing is the delay in background checks for the applicants who have been offered a job. Albert Fontenot, an associate director with the Bureau stated, "Our challenge is not getting people to apply, it's just getting them through the system." Once the applicant clears any background checks, they will begin paid training sessions in January and February.

Historically, the first nine censuses (1790-1870) were conducted by U.S. Marshalls before the Census Bureau was created. They typically lived in or near the towns and villages where they gathered information and more often than not, knew the inhabitants.

Throughout the years, the country's needs shifted, and every decade the census questions reflected the changing times. For the first six censuses (1790-1840), only the names of the head of a household were recorded along with general information regarding the remaining members of the household. In the 1850s, social issues topped the list of questions with regards to crime, taxation, poverty and churches. At this point in time, all members of a household were named on the census along with those of slaves (which was carried over, for the last time, to the 1860 census). The late 19th century accounting included information about agriculture and industry as the country recovered from the devastating effects of the Civil War. Today, many Americans are in search of information regarding their ancestry. Little did the early census takers know that their efforts could one day be used to trace long-lost members of a family tree.

The 2020 Census is, according to the Census Bureau, an easy one to fill out. Questions include: how many people are living or staying at your home on April 1, 2020; whether the home is owned or rented; the sex of each person in your home; the age of each person in your home; the race of each person in your home; whether a person in your home is of Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin; and the relationship of each person in your home.

The 2020 inquiries are designed to enforce laws, regulations and policies against discrimination. Also intended is to provide adequate funding to support specific age groups such as children and the elderly. The Census Bureau stresses that all personal information is kept confidential by federal law and that data is used for statistical purposes only. Any identifiable information cannot be released to law enforcement, government agencies or court. Their Information Technology infrastructure is designed to defend against and contain cyber threats.

According to the Bureau, you will never be asked to provide a Social Security number, bank or credit card account numbers, send money or make a donation, or be contacted on behalf of a political party. If someone visits your home to collect a response for the 2020 Census be sure to verify their identity. They should carry a valid ID badge with their photo, a U.S. Department of Commerce watermark and an expiration date. If you still have questions about their identity call (800) 923-8282 to speak with a local Census Bureau representative. If it is determined that the person at your door does not work for the Census Bureau notify your local police department.

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