

## In Pittsburgh, older ride-sharing drivers offer wisdom behind the wheel

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When a passenger recently wondered aloud about the meaning of the phrase "Bye, Felicia," Pittsburgh Uber driver George DeBolt knew the answer, even though he's not quite in the demographic one might expect to have such information.

DeBolt, 66, said in addition to helping him earn some extra money, driving for the San Francisco-based ride-sharing company has allowed him to connect with popular culture, music and references he might otherwise not know now that his daughters have gone off to college. He's been driving for Uber for about five months and says he drives about 20 to 30 hours a week.

"It's really an eye-opener, letting me see things I never thought I'd see," he said. "I get to hear music I would never in a million years listen to, especially on Friday and Saturday nights."

Although Uber and Lyft tend to hold information about their companies' inner workings close to the vest, a workforce snapshot that Uber released in January shows over-50 drivers are the largest demographic in two of the company's four driver segments: those with no previous professional [driving experience](#), and those who have driven taxis or black cars. In both of those segments, the drivers are overwhelmingly male, the report states.

Given the grayish population of the Pittsburgh area it makes sense that Uber's workforce, and probably Lyft's as well, would skew older and

male in the region.

Retired hairdresser Dennis Tague said he doesn't need the money he earns driving for Lyft, but misses the feeling of being "in the know" that he got from working in a hair salon.

"I enjoy talking to people, and this gives me the opportunity to meet new people every day. And my generation tends to have nicer cars and good insurance - all the criteria they want in drivers," he said.

The only drawback at first, Tague admitted, was learning the technology required to be a ride-sharing driver. Both Uber and Lyft enlist drivers in their own vehicles with passengers via smartphone apps. "It was a little difficult to work the app at first, but it did not take long to learn," he said. "You have to embrace the technology. It's not scary."

Tague said driving for Lyft lets him earn extra cash for unexpected expenses, such as a recent dental crisis, putting an end to the idea of a fixed income. "I needed some cash quick, so I just drove a few extra trips. Very easy."

The AARP says a number of factors have caused baby boomers who would have otherwise retired at 65 to remain in the workforce. "For some, this is choice; for others, a necessity."

The organization supports ride-sharing as an option for older workers. "State and local governments should encourage low-cost innovative programs, such as ride-sharing, to help meet older adults' transportation needs."

Neither ride-sharing company has a maximum age limit for drivers, just a minimum age of 21. That allows them to avoid the inexperience of teenage drivers, who, according to the Insurance Institute for Highway

Safety, are nearly three times more likely than drivers over 20 to be involved in a fatal accident. But as drivers get older, their faculties and eyesight begin to show the effects of old age, causing another category of driver that is considered high-risk.

While neither Tague nor DeBolt is old enough to be a risk for driving impaired by the effects of aging, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's research shows older drivers are involved in more fatal crashes than their younger counterparts.

A 2013 NHTSA report found the risk of impairment starts around age 75, but the risk older drivers might pose is offset by the fact that they typically drive fewer miles than younger drivers. "However in recent years, [older drivers](#) have been increasing their mileage," the report states. "Thus the problem of older driver crash involvement is likely to increase over time."

Former journalist Bill Steigerwald, 66, who considers himself semiretired, has driven for Uber for about six months. He thinks he's a fairly typical ride-sharing driver: "I'm happy to have no boss, and to drive whenever I want to," he said.

He estimated he works about 24 hours a week, and brings in around \$500 per week.

But [drivers](#) who are eligible to collect Social Security have to make sure they don't earn too much working for Uber or Lyft, lest they risk their benefits being reduced.

The Social Security Administration's guidelines for 2015 allow those younger than full [retirement age](#) who are collecting benefits to earn \$15,720 without penalty. Those who reach full retirement age this year can collect their full benefits and earn \$41,880 in the months before

reaching full retirement age. In the month they reach full retirement age, there's no limit on earnings.

If he ever felt like he was not able to drive anymore, Tague said he would quit. "I've always been in great shape," he said. "But if I felt like it I was having problems with my vision, or if anything was affecting my driving, I would definitely step back."

For the record, "Bye, Felicia," is a way of dismissing someone of little consequence and was first uttered by rapper/actor Ice Cube in the 1995 film "Friday."

It's that kind of insight that DeBolt said keeps him looking forward to picking up passengers.

"I know Pittsburgh really well, and I love to drive," he said. "The best part of the job for me is the hundreds of unique encounters every week. It's great exposure to what's going on in the world."

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