

I'm just a girl next door who got lucky

POSH'S AMAZING NEW BOOK

OLD masters

A TOAST TO WORKING

LONDONER Arnold Brooks is all in favour of the forthcoming legislation which will outlaw age discrimination at work.

After all, the 71-year-old didn't even start his current career as Master of Ceremonies Toastmaster and film extra until he retired from his East End shop-fitting business at the age of 65.

"The last thing I wanted to do was to stop work," he says. "I wanted something new and had always fancied acting."

Arnold, who has 10 grandchildren, approached the London Guild of Toastmasters and took some of their courses. Those and the necessary clothes plus a PA system can cost from £1,500.

"Far from taking it easy I decided to commit myself to a new future," he adds. "There was a lot to learn. You need to know the guides to procedure and etiquette for all types of functions from weddings to major dinners."

Instead of being a hindrance to his success, Arnold believes his age is definitely an asset.

"For this job you need experience - experience of people," he says. "You're often responsible for making sure someone's special day runs the best it can. For that you need great people and communication skills."

"You need to be able to control a room of people, keeping an eye on everyone to ensure things run smoothly."

His mature years have also helped him land work as an extra.

"I decided to give it a go and

joined 10 agents," he says. "The work came flooding in. I've done everything from KitKat adverts to documentaries to Holly City and The Bill."

Arnold is one of a growing number of people who have found a fulfilling career after the age of retirement.

And that number is set to increase from October 1, when The Employment Directive on Equal Treatment Britain outlaws age discrimination in the workplace.

"Age regulations have been on the horizon for years and employers need to wake up to the fact they are nearly here," says Sam Mercer, director of the Employer's Forum on Age (EFA).

"Any employer who hasn't got age-equality as a priority in their business is going to be in trouble."

According to the EFA, whose 230 members include B&Q, Barclays, BT, Manpower, Marks & Spencer, Royal Mail and Sainsbury's, age discrimination costs the UK economy up to £1million a year.

Although the new law gives workers the right to request to stay on after the age of 65 and says this should be "considered", many groups representing the over 50s feel it doesn't go far enough.

"Forcing people to retire is denying them the right to work - a right everyone should have," says Neil Churchill of Heyday, which promotes age diversity at work.

But at least it is a start and will hopefully create many more elderly workers as happy as Arnold.

"The joy I get from being with people as they celebrate a special occasion is amazing," he says. "And to be a part of the filming process is great fun, too."

"How could I have missed all this just because I was over 65?"

RAISE YOUR GLASSES! Since retiring Arnold works as a toastmaster

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JOBWATCH

● MORE THAN 75 companies will be attending a Job and Career Opportunities Exhibition coming to the Rivermead Leisure Centre in Reading on September 6 and 7, and a café. Find out more by calling 01494 522714 or visiting the organisers' website at www.largenville.co.uk

● IN THE North East, the seasonal job fairs continue, with high-street names teaming up with Jobcentre Plus to recruit staff for the coming festive season.

Dorothy Bowmaker from Jobcentre Plus says: "The run-up to Christmas can be a great time of year to land a job because many seasonal, temporary jobs can become permanent."

This week's fairs begin today at Jobcentre Plus in Crescent House, Darlington.

Doors will be open between 10.30am and 5pm and visitors will be able to apply for jobs with a wide range of employers including TK Maxx, Matalan, Boots, House of Fraser, H Samuel, Orange and B&Q.

● TOMORROW the action moves to Teesside Retail Park in Thornaby, where the Action Team Bus will be parked between 11am and 3pm.

This fair will offer opportunities with at least 20 local employers including JJB Sports, PC World, Gala Casino, JD Sports, Toys 'R' Us, Starbucks, Superdrug, Currys, WH Smith and Hollywood Bowl.

● ON SATURDAY, there is a fair at Grange Road Jobcentre in Middlesbrough between 10am and 4pm, offering job opportunities with Next, M&S, Debenhams, Woolworths, Primark, Wilkinsons and Argos among others.

For more information about job opportunities in the area, telephone Jobseeker Direct on 0845 6660 234.

For more jobs visit mirror.co.uk/jobs

KEY POINTS IN THE NEW LAW

- The direct use of age limits in recruitment is unlawful.
- Indirect ageism - where people of a particular age group are disadvantaged - is also unlawful.
- Employers can refuse to recruit people within six months of their retirement age, or 65 if you don't have one.
- Harassment and victimisation because of age are unlawful and can never be justified.
- It will be unlawful to unjustifiably exclude someone from training on the grounds of their age.
- The introduction of a "national default retirement age" will allow employers to "compulsorily" retire people at 65 without justification.
- Individuals have "a right to request to stay on" and employers have a "duty to consider that request".

MORE INFORMATION

- The Employer's Forum on Age (EFA) is the voice of employers on age issues in the workplace and sets the UK age/employment agenda. Visit efa.org.uk
- For information on promoting age diversity in the workplace visit agepositive.gov.uk
- Heyday (www.heyday.org.uk) and Age Concern (www.ageconcern.co.uk) campaign against mandatory retirement ages (MRAs)
- Contact Arnold at www.masterofceremonies.co.uk For training visit www.toastmastersguild.org.uk