



March 2009

## Spotlight Bisbee

## Perspectives on Age

by: Bill Schooling

### KEY STATISTICS

Population Estimate -

July 1, 2008 - 6,389

Source: Arizona Department of Commerce

### BASIC INFORMATION

Founded : 1860

Incorporated: 1902

Located in Cochise County

Nearby HWYS St. Route 80

Enterprise Zone Available

Source: Arizona Department of Commerce  
and US Census Bureau

### LABOR FORCE STATISTICS

Employment: 3,292

Unemployment: 205

Unemployment Rate: 5.9%

Source: Arizona Department of Commerce  
2008

### MAJOR PRIVATE EMPLOYERS

Arizona Southern Distributors

Copper Queen Community Hospital

Copper Queen Hotel

Freeport-McMoran Copper

Safeway

Source: Arizona Department of Commerce

We have all heard comments about how 50 is the new 40 or 70 is the new 60, meaning that we are tending to live longer and maintaining more active lives for more years than in previous generations. In fact, one piece of demographic data, called life expectancy at birth supports the longevity part of these claims.

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a child born in the United States could expect to live an average of 47.3 years. By 1950, the expectation was 68.2 years. This was a huge improvement in a relatively short period of time. Better nutrition and sanitation, safety improvements, and improving medical care probably all deserve some of the credit. In the 1960's and 1970's demographers, medical professionals, and others interested in aging debated when these improvements would skid to an end. Many believed that the number could never, on average, exceed 85 years of age. What has proven surprising, at least to some, is that the improvement in life expectancy has continued. Although it has slowed and has not yet reached the 85 mark, the progress has remained.

Differences still exist between races and there is a gender gap, with females living longer than males. However, males are narrowing the gap. Females born in 1970 could expect to live more than 7 and half years longer than males. By 2005, that gap was down to just over 5 years (75.2 compared to 80.4 years), with a combined expectation of 77.8 years.

How old is Arizona? We aged eight years between 1970 and 2000, with the median age standing at 34.2 years at the time of the last census. In terms

of the median age in 2000, Arizona's was a year younger than the United States as a whole. How will our progress with longevity, and changing migration patterns and fertility rates affect our age profile? Data from the 2010 will provide some interesting answers.

In 2000, we had almost 668,000 individuals who were at least 65 years of age living in Arizona. That represented about 13 percent of Arizona's population. As recently as 1950, Arizona's 65 and over population accounted for less than 6 percent of the total. Starting in 2011, the baby-boomers will be gaining admission to this group, so we know the total numbers will swell. Another perspective on age has to do with labor force status. In 2000, over 16,000 Arizonans who were at least 75 years of age were in the labor force.

Currently, most data on labor force contain measurements using those at least 16 years of age for the base population. In earlier years, our perspective on younger age groups must have been different as well. For example, the 1930 census reveals that Arizona had 16 individuals between 10 and 14 years of age who were unemployed. Although only 1.6% of those between 10 and 13 years of age were "gainfully occupied," that jumped to 4.2% for 14 year olds, 9.2% for 15 year olds and 19.2% for 16 year olds. Legal, economic and technological conditions (including educational requirements) have altered the context of our world, but so has our social perspective of appropriate activities for younger members of our society. Age is relative.