

BUSINESS CASUAL

Flexible scheduling loosens reins

■ Employers are finding that workers who can keep to hours they choose are more productive, more creative and more willing to go the extra mile.

BY BRETT GRAFF
Special to The Herald

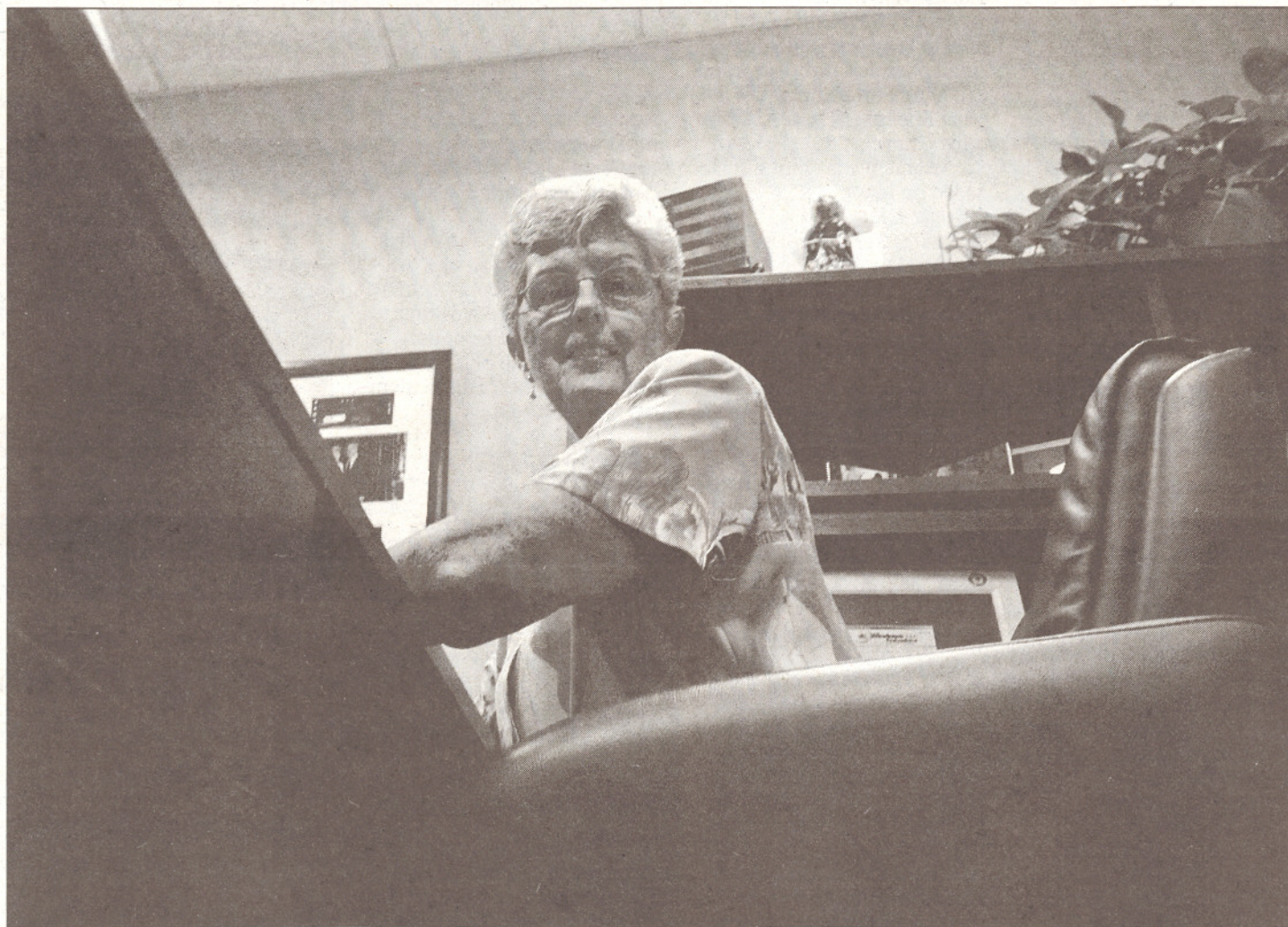
Dotte Moss, assistant to real estate developer Ed Easton, lives 20 minutes from her West Dade office — unless there's traffic. So Moss avoids the highways crammed with cars during traditional rush hours, arriving at work at 7 a.m. and leaving by 4 p.m.

"I'd rather spend that extra time in the office than on the Palmetto Expressway," she says. "Plus, I get up early, so I'm happy to come in and save myself the trouble of traffic."

Moss is one of the more than 29 million Americans who have full-time jobs with flexible work schedules, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. And although there are no statistics available for flex-timers in South Florida, it's a policy the local labor market has embraced, says economist Manuel Lasaga, president of the consulting firm StratInfo in Miami.

"It makes good business sense," he says. Employees who can accommodate their personal lives arrive at work more focused and less stressed. And that, Lasaga says, increases productivity.

Dindy Yokel, president of DindyCo on Miami Beach, finds it also increases loyalty. The publicist for such local hot spots as The District and the Wave Hotel accommo-



PETER ANDREW BOSCH/HERALD STAFF

SAVING TIME: Dotte Moss, an executive assistant to real estate developer Ed Easton, goes in to work at 7 a.m. and leaves at 4 p.m. to avoid a bottlenecked commute. 'I'd rather spend that extra time in the office,' she says.

ing course load, an employee who simply prefers a later schedule, and a commuter from Coral Gables who, like Moss, thinks her time is better spent in the office than on the road.

"Time seems to motivate

says Yokel. "When I opened my own business I said, 'I'm going to remember that employees are human beings with lives.'"

Yokel says her compassion pays off. When demanding projects call for longer hours,

forgoing their free time for work functions.

"I never feel like I'm imposing," she says, "because they know what they get in return."

And she feels like she gets the better end of the bargain because her team arrives

Alienworks, which builds high performance computers and employs nearly 280 people near Tamiami Airport, is on similar ground. Many members of its creative team, such as the software develop-

Freer hours, happier workers

• TRAFFIC, FROM 32G

ers, work better when they don't have to answer to a morning alarm clock.

The company's acceptance of flexible work hours isn't written in stone, or even a manual, but it's become the culture, says Alex Aguila, president and chief operating officer.

He says some arrive as late as 11 a.m. or 1 p.m.

"They're dealing with high-level projects so we want them to work when they get inspired," Aguila says. "We look only at the output of that department and if it's great, we're happy. And we've never had to change the output of that department."

Other jobs, both at Alienworks and beyond, have schedules that are impossible to loosen due to critical interaction and coordination with those on standard shifts.

Occasionally, says Robin Pinkley, associate professor

and director of the Center for Conflict Resolution and Labor Relations at Cox University in Dallas, the employees forced to fight traffic and/or forgo family commitments become resentful.

To ward off conflict, Pinkley recommends that flex-time employees make themselves accessible even at times when they're not at the office. "Jobs today allow for and depend on multiple means of communication," she says. "Flex employees should check voice mail messages and e-mails during regular office hours."

And nonflex employees should remember before barking with envy that their latecomer counterparts may also be missing a digit or two from their paychecks.

"Sometimes people are willing to take less money than they would otherwise," Pinkley says. "So you're comparing an orange to an orange and a half."