

# If the Butler Does It, You'll Pay; The Rich Need More Servants. How Does \$80K a Year Sound?

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The rich might be getting richer, but their lives are hardly trouble-free. In Southern California, there aren't enough servants to go around.

Wealthy families need more chefs to prepare their meals, more maids and butlers to serve them, more housekeepers to keep their mansions tidy and more nannies and night nurses to tend their offspring. All this demand is putting Peggy Gardiner in a pretty position. She's a professionally trained cook, good with kids, an expert on laundry. She can do light bookkeeping and boss others around. In her last full-time gig, she oversaw a staff of six on a \$15-million estate near San Diego.

"My job is like being the best, most organized wife," Gardiner says. "I'll do almost anything to make you comfortable."

Some of her virtues aren't immediately obvious. She's respectful of wealth but not awed by it. She's tight with a buck, something the wealthy always appreciate and frequently require. At 61, happily married with four grandsons and a few extra pounds, she won't be a temptation to the man of the house or a threat to the woman.

She's looking for a minimum of \$80,000 a year, plus housing, health insurance, three weeks' paid vacation and what she calls "good vibes," which means she doesn't want to work for a manic-depressive again, which she briefly did in Silicon Valley.

"I won't settle for less," Gardiner says.

She probably won't have to, given the thriving market for what the government calls "private household



workers."

"The wealthy are living larger than ever. Forget about second homes. Now you have a third home, a fourth home. And these aren't little shacks. They need staffs." The number of private household workers jumped 67% in Southern California over the last five years to nearly 150,000, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. This total doesn't include illegal-immigrant nannies and gardeners or anyone paid off the books. Dennis Meyers, principal economist at the California Department of Finance, says such strong growth isn't surprising. "We have so many new millionaires," he says.

More than a quarter-million households in the Southland have incomes exceeding \$200,000 a year, according to census data, up 45% since 1999. There are multiple reasons for the rise, including a robust stock market, President Bush's 2001 tax cuts, the recent real estate boom and an entrepreneurial economy good



at creating wealth.

The burgeoning service industry now has its own glossy magazine, *CelebStaff: Managing Mansions and Estates*. Its offices are in Beverly Hills.

"For the average Joe, this type of lifestyle is unimaginable," the *CelebStaff* editors write, "but those that live it will have it no other way!"

If the average Joe only knew, those in the field say, he could be upgrading his own life by working for the wealthy.

"He could be making \$50,000, \$60,000, \$70,000 a year at a mansion in Bel-Air with museum-quality furnishings rather than cooped up as a \$9-an-hour computer programmer in a cubicle in Mid-Wilshire," says Baker, who started his company in 2004 after a stint as a recruiter for a search firm.

Peggy Gardiner didn't grow up aspiring to be "staff." Modesto, the Central Valley community where she was raised and lived until the late 1980s, had a few millionaires ~ the Gallo wine family lived there ~ but they drove their own cars and sent their children to local schools. The rich had more money but were otherwise like everyone else.

Gardiner's mother was a nurse; her father died young. "If we had problems, they were taken care of by someone in the family," she says. "We didn't call in anyone. That's the way it was for everyone."

Her life took an upward turn when she married her second husband, Richard, who ran a real estate investment firm. Before, she went straight for the sales rack. Then Richard said, "Someone should pay retail, and it should be us." She got a 5-carat diamond ring. They moved to Roseville, near Sacramento, and got a big house, a Lexus and a housekeeper. She helped Richard in the real estate business and found that the clients preferred to talk to her. ("I was the nice one. He was a little more terse.") She also discovered that she liked solving problems for people.

Richard's business eventually collapsed. The housekeeper was dismissed and the jewelry sold. Having rejoined the ranks of the working class,



Gardiner signed up with the Starkey International Institute for Household Management in Denver. Founded in 1989 by a dynamo named Mary Louise Starkey, it's one of the few comprehensive training programs for what Starkey, in another terminology upgrade, calls household or estate managers. Cost of the eight-week course: \$13,000.

Starkey also acts as a placement agency. Mary Louise Starkey says the demand for trained household managers is so great she could immediately find jobs for "hundreds of thousands" of them.

Her students, who range from former hotel industry workers in their 20s to retired military aides in their 50s.

They're quizzed on the details. Which side is a dinner guest served on? How does one stand? Why iron the newspaper? (To dry the ink so it doesn't come off on employer's hands.)

"You don't have to belittle yourself or degrade yourself to serve," Starkey says. "Someone is the giver, someone is the receiver. They're very equal roles."



And, increasingly, from equal backgrounds as well. The spotlight on illegal immigration is by some accounts causing agencies and their prominent clients to become stricter on proper documentation.

Meanwhile, the increasing size and complexity of estates requires workers who are accomplished in technical matters -- programming security systems, for instance -- and proficient in English.

This puts some employers, particularly those who have come into their money recently, in awkward positions.

"Most people have no problem receiving from someone who is a domestic -- a housekeeper who barely speaks English," Starkey says. "It's much more difficult to receive from someone who has a master's degree in art history. This isn't servant material."

After graduating from Starkey, Gardiner worked for a venture capitalist and his family in their 6,500-square-foot home in Washington state. She moved on to a position in Fort Wayne, Ind., taking care of a 14,000-square-foot home, but after three years the cold weather got her down.

"You have to have your own outside life," Gardiner says over a tuna salad at a San Clemente seaside restaurant. "You never take care of the family you work for the way you would take care of your personal family. They're not the one you're going to give a kidney to."

That doesn't mean the family doesn't respond. On the contrary.

"The family has a tendency to take you to their bosom. Before you know it, you're a mother, grandmother, sister. And when that happens, you lose an important boundary of respect."

A uniform helps. She's wearing it today -- dark slacks, a blazer, her Starkey pin. "You are in the house but not of the house," she says. It's a Starkey motto.

Some other lessons she learned on the job:

\* The task of the help is to make the lives of the principals -- the industry term for the clients -- run as smooth as glass. "The principals don't want to hear any negatives. They don't want to see anything that should have been swept up, picked up or repaired. And if something falls through the cracks and they unload on you, you always have to be willing to apologize."

\* Keep quiet. She was preparing dinner while the principals, who liked to love loud and fight loud, were having an animated discussion. "Let's ask Peggy what she thinks," the husband decided. Gardiner declined to take sides.

\* Rich people know the value of a dollar. "Principals always want to know if a contractor or salesman will discount for cash. Always. Always."

\* What they do with those dollars is up to them. "If they take \$60,000 to rent a private jet, it's their business. You can't think about how they just spent in a few days what you make in a year."

A household worker who seamlessly and cheerfully is able to exemplify all these qualities is deemed in the industry to have something called the "service heart."

It's an impersonal yet intimate connection. The employee's office is in his principal's kitchen, bedroom and bathroom.

"You're giving of yourself, and you're not going to take much back beyond your paycheck," says Norman Meunier, who took the Starkey class in 2000.

There is a lingering stigma to this line of work, Mary Starkey concedes.

"The roots of household management are in slavery," she says. "When you go home and tell Mom and Dad you're going to take a course in this, they'll say, 'You're nuts to pay \$13,000 to be a slave or servant.'"

Gardiner doesn't feel like a slave. In fact, after a few months' vacation, when she indulged her love of



movies by sometimes seeing two a day, she is eager to get back to using her skills, to serving.

A family in Orange County and a couple in Riverside have asked for her employment packet, but Gardiner will make the final decision on where she works. She wants to be especially careful.

"I'm hoping this will be my last position," she says. She figures she has eight or nine years left to take care of others, and then she'll retire and spend her days taking care of herself and her husband.

