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## Tattoos no longer taboo

By Kate Finneren  
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

A red lizard on a job seeker's arm once might have meant "hit the road." But now that red lizard — along with those nose and eyebrow rings — may mean "you're hired."

Many corporate doors once closed to tattoos and piercings are beginning to open as more employers embrace an increasing number of decorated grad-

### Body art pierces business world

uates entering the work force.

More than one-third of young people now sport tattoos and other forms of body art, according to a recent survey by the outplacement firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas Inc.

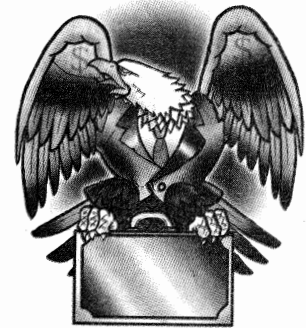
That means 1.3 million col-

lege graduates are expected to enter the work force — and so are their tattoos and piercings.

Younger and hipper industries like technology, biotechnology, advertising, marketing and entertainment are more open to body piercings and jewelry, said John A. Challenger, chief executive officer of the Chicago firm.

"Plus, a growing number of

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Linus Garsys/The Washington Times

employers recognize the benefits of diversity in all its forms and are embracing the unique attributes that make people stand out from the crowd," he said.

Other workplace experts disagree, including Jill Bremer, owner of Bremer Communications, an image and etiquette consultant who has been teaching workplace civility since 1986.

Corporations — especially in conservative industries like fi-

nance and law — must protect their brand, and their employees are part of their brand, she said.

"The problem is that corporations are afraid to regulate it — when they have every right to do so — because they're afraid they're going to get taken to court," she said.

In fact, companies — not employees — win the majority of discrimination suits because tattoos and piercings are not protected in most states and companies have the legal right to dismiss employees with visible body artwork, Ms. Bremer said.

"But corporations are afraid

to do it, and what I have found is that managers are afraid to manage," she said. "Everyone's afraid to say something to everyone else because it sounds bad."

As a result, most traditionally staid industries — including the legal, finance and some health care professions — do not specifically ban body decor, but they do not accept it either, preferring a "don't ask, don't tell" policy, said Ms. Bremer, whose clients have included Oracle Corp., Abbott Laboratories, W.W. Grainger, the Department of Energy and the National Association of Realtors.

Shulman Rogers Gandal Pordy & Ecker, a large firm in Montgomery County, has no explicit policy regarding visible body art, but someone pierced head to toe is not going to fit in the legal profession's culture, said David Pordy, managing partner.

"A small tattoo on the shoulder that becomes visible depending on the outfit — we have plenty of those — but like anything else, it's a question of degree and judgment," Mr. Pordy said.

Thirty-six percent of 25- to 29-year-olds have tattoos, compared with 16 percent of Amer-

icans of all ages, according to a Harris Interactive poll conducted in 2003.

Many companies have flexible dress codes that are changing with the times, said Jen Jorgensen, spokeswoman for the Society for Human Resource Management.

"Most organizations have a dress-code policy and — as fashions change — they have to update their policies, as well," she said.

D.C. mortgage giant Fannie Mae, however, is one of the growing number of employers that accepts differences among

its employees and employs people with tattoos and piercings, spokeswoman Gabrielle Barry said.

"It's not a big problem," Ms. Barry said. "It's accepted in the workplace. It's not taboo."

Bank of America asks associates to maintain a professional image, but does not have a formal dress code, said spokeswoman Kelly Sapp.

Other companies that do not have specific dress codes or bans on tattoos or body piercings include Friedman, Billings, Ramsey Group Inc., T. Rowe Price and Legg Mason.