

Economy drives older workers into limited job pool

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more middle-aged and older applicants to seek seasonal jobs.

The city hires employees from a range of ages for seasonal work. The minimum age for seasonal employment is 14, for recreation aides.

Two people employed in the city's seasonal beach tag program are in their 80s.

The city does not keep records of applicants' and seasonal employees' ages, although Cioeta said the city has hired many middle-aged and older seasonal workers.

The city hires more than 600 seasonal employees annually, Cioeta said, although numbers vary each year.

The number of seasonal employees hired is entirely dependent on the city's budget.

The largest seasonal divisions are the city's lifeguards and beach tag staff.

There are about 170 lifeguards and 150 beach tag staffers, Cioeta said.

However, the city also hires restroom attendants, public works staff, seasonal law enforcement, recreation employees for summer camps and programs, clerks, municipal violations staff and more.

A seasonal employee's duration varies depending on the job.

Beach tag staff begins as late as June 12, while janitorial staff members, who work on the Boardwalk, begin as early as Palm Sunday.

Staff members may work as needed until the summer season begins.

Applicants also come from several locations, including locally and from Delaware, New York and Pennsylvania.

The city does hire foreign workers with a J-1 Visa, although they do not work with recruiting agencies.

A J-1 Visa, according to the U.S. State Department, is for individuals approved to participate in work and study-based visitor exchange programs.

"We don't count on them for the bulk of our workforce," Cioeta said. "We have some jobs that are really hard to fill, like restroom attendants. They come and go all season ... If we have openings in the summer, we'll plug them (J-1 workers) in."

J-1 workers do make up about 40 percent to 50 percent of the local seasonal hotel industry's staffing, according to Pat Gallelli, president of the Ocean City New Jersey Hospitality Association and owner of the Tahiti Inn.

The J-1 workers began to come to Ocean City on a small scale in the mid-1980s, Gallelli said.

"In the '90s, it became a really large program, where we started to see students from everywhere: Macedonia, Russia, Mexico, Spain, Russia, Italy, China. Now what's happened in the last five years, the J-1 students are a little more scarce."

According to Gallelli, the decline in J-1 students comes from greater security following the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and the high cost of traveling, securing a visa and living in the United States for students in countries with a poor economy.

Gallelli said this season, the Hospitality Association dis-

cussed opening communications among the city's hotels/motels regarding J-1 workers seeking employment. If a J-1 worker applies at one hotel/motel and the establishment is not hiring, the hotel/motel could call other hotels/motels in the city to see if another place needs staff.

The J-1 employees are "extremely vital" to the seasonal lodging industry, Gallelli said. Local staff can be hard to find or have difficulty with committing to a full season.

Some qualified local applicants are interested in year-round employment and not seasonal jobs, Gallelli said. Local high school and college students can be committed to sports in the summer, or will leave in August to return to college.

"To lose employees you count on in the middle of August is really challenging," Gallelli said.

The Tahiti Inn employs about 19 people during the season, Gallelli said. Although it is closed in the off-season, it employs two people for maintenance work.

"I know for a while, in 2009, 2010 and 2011, we were all trying to do the same amount of work with a little less employees because of the issues with the summer becoming softer," Gallelli said. "This year more than anything we're projecting a busy summer."

With summer expected to be strong, Gallelli anticipated hiring more employees than in years past.

However, the hiring challenge in the seasonal lodging industry is the unpredictability of a summer season.

"It's a real challenge to hire because we might anticipate a busy summer and then it's not as busy as normal," Gallelli said. "As a seasonal business, we're basing our income for the entire year on six, seven weeks, essentially."

At Playland's Castaway Cove, J-1 employees make up about 25 of the 230 seasonal employees working at the height of the summer season, according to Brian Hartley, Playland vice president.

Ninety to 95 percent of Playland's staff returns each year and jobs are competitive.

Since the end of the 2013 season, Playland has received 500 applications for about 25 to 30 jobs.

Seventy-five percent of those employees are local, Hartley said.

Playland opens Easter weekend and remains open through October, which is why the bulk of the workforce is local, Hartley said.

J-1 students fill in the gaps for student employees who leave to return to college or play a sport in the fall, but those gaps are widening.

"It's not the same it used to be 10 or 15 years ago, where (American) kids want to work 40 hours a week," Hartley said. "They may want to work 20 hours now."

Hartley also mentioned the federal legislation HR 3344, which he felt could limit the number of J-1 workers if it passed.

The Fraudulent Overseas Recruitment and Trafficking Elimination Act of 2013 states that foreign-labor recruiters provide written information at the time of recruitment,

including a description of anti-trafficking protections under U.S. law, the identity and addresses of the recruiter and employer, terms and conditions of employment, information regarding job training, a signed copy of the employment contract and more.

It also requires third-party foreign-labor recruiters to register with the Department of Labor and requires the DOL to charge fees sufficient to cover the cost of registration activities, and allows the DOL to require registered recruiters "to post a bond in an amount sufficient to protect recruited workers."

"At the end of the year, that could have a huge impact if we don't have those kids here to fill that void," Hartley said. "We could be talking about us having to change our operating hours or not open the rides."

Wes Kazmarck, president of the Ocean City Boardwalk Merchants Association and owner of the Surf Mall, said he usually hires two to three J-1 workers per season out of 30 employees at the Surf Mall.

The Surf Mall includes several merchants. Total, there are about 50 to 55 employees working there in the summer, with 10 being J-1 workers.

Kazmarck has already hired the J-1 workers for the 2014 season. He said he hired them online, through a recruiting company.

According to Kazmarck, the bulk of J-1 students are now hired online before they arrive in the United States, although others search for second jobs when they arrive.

The bulk of Kazmarck's non-J-1 employees are returning staff.

He often hires students in high school who work seasonally until they finish college.

However, Kazmarck said student commitments to sports and activities can be challenging.

The first question he asks students in interviews is "How many sports do you play?"

"The thing is, it's a temporary job," Kazmarck said about hiring challenges. "There is no long-term employment. That's always a challenge."

Jobs outlook mixed

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Hirsch said he felt April's weather was much better than the previous year's.

"Weather always plays a big factor," he said.

Phones are busy, he said, but callers are shopping around for the best rates.

He said his hotel and restaurant have increased hiring by 5 percent above last year.

Hirsch concurred with Bashaw that worry about damage from Hurricane Sandy will not affect this summer season.

He said he uses a few J-1s but also uses H2B workers, who are permitted to fill temporary seasonal jobs. The program allows workers to come to the U.S. from other countries for three years. They work for one employer for six months and another for six months.

Hirsch said H2Bs would work for the Montreat Beach Resort for six months in the summer and work for a ski resort or Florida hotel or restaurant for the winter season. H2Bs will return to their homeland for one year after finishing three years in the U.S. and then be eligible to return for another three-year stint.

Lobster House Restaurant Manager Mark Ryan said he would hire about 100 seasonal employees to work in the restaurant, raw bar and take-out window. He said the seasonal workers are mainly young people.

"We get a lot of college kids," Ryan said. "They're rehires, about 20 to 30 of them come back."

He said some college students return to work at the Lobster House and never leave. "The job market out there is not real great," Ryan said. "They have a degree but they stay."

He said he was hiring about the same number of seasonal workers as last year.

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	A.M.	P.M.	A.M.	P.M.
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22	2:59	3:47	9:10	9:42
23	4:04	4:48	10:08	10:47
24	5:06	5:44	11:03	11:47
25	6:03	6:35	11:54	
26	6:55	7:22	12:41	12:43
27	7:44	8:06	1:32	1:29
28	8:30	8:47	2:19	2:12

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