Too Many Job Seekers

Tampa Tribune - Tampa, Fla.

Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Officials Forced To Turn Some Away

Jan 4, 2004 – written by JOE HUMPHREY - Metro Section

TAMPA - With his pressed khakis and a blue dress shirt stowed in the back seat, Daniel Shay folded himself into his Honda Accord about 6 a.m. Saturday and headed north for Tampa, looking for work.

A newspaper clipping lured him here from Fort Myers, where he has lived in a motel for about two months since leaving his native New York.

The clipping touted work at the new Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino at Orient Road and Interstate 4.

Shay, 31, wanted to work in a kitchen.

On the first day of a job fair at the Tampa Convention Center, Shay interviewed with the complex's executive chef and was hired as a line cook at the Seminole Hard Rock.

He'll start work in the coming weeks.

Shay was among about 150 people hired Saturday, a hectic day for officials.

More than 2,500 people turned out for the job fair, held to staff the new hotel and expanded casino run by the Seminole tribe.

The first job seeker showed up before 7 a.m. and nearly 500 applicants were lined up by 8:30 a.m., a half-hour before the hiring fair began.

Just past noon, hotel officials started turning away job seekers, telling them to return another day because too many applicants already were awaiting interviews that would run past 6 p.m.

Janet Spierling arrived just past noon and wished she had shown up earlier.

The St. Petersburg resident has been out of work since August, when she was laid off as manager of a condominium complex.

She said she has had to borrow money and live off unemployment compensation.

She plans to come back on Monday - and to arrive early.

"Yes, oh yes. I need a job," she said.

The Seminole tribe opened a casino east of Tampa in 1982 and debuted an expansion in June.

Another expansion, which will double gaming space to 90,000 square feet and include a 250-room Hard Rock Hotel, is expected to open in March.

Many Positions Available

Officials plan to hire 950 employees at the job fair that is scheduled to continue through next week and about 800 more workers in the next few months.

Already, about 800 people work at the complex, general manager John Fontana said.

Positions in many fields are up for grabs, from busboys, butchers and buyers to painters, pastry chefs and plumbers.

Fontana said pay ranges from about $2.75 an hour for tipped employees, such as bartenders and servers, to other hourly positions paying $7-$7.50 to $15-$18.

Management positions start at about $28,000, he said.

Rock music played softly in the background as potential employees filled out paperwork in a convention center meeting room on Saturday.

From there, applicants stood in line for a chance to sit down and await a screening interview.

The turnout was far better than expected, marketing director Doug Hoppe said.

Some of that may have to do with unemployed workers looking to change their luck.

The Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater area posted an unemployment rate of 4 percent in November, which is considered low.

But not every applicant was unemployed.

Name A Plus

Bridget Davis of Tampa has a full-time job with Southwest Airlines but came to the fair seeking part-time work on the activities staff. She said the Hard Rock name was a major draw, adding that if it were just the Seminole Indian casino she probably would not have bothered to apply.

Fontana agreed the name is a major draw for potential employees and will likely be the same for patrons, even though the casino is owned and operated by the tribe. Hard Rock's name is the product of a franchise agreement.

"Hard Rock is a culture," he said. "It's not just a brand."

The job fair continues from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. today., then noon to 8 p.m. on Monday and Tuesday.

Four days scheduled for next week, Jan. 12-15, may not be necessary, Hoppe said. The Tampa Convention Center is located downtown at 333 S. Franklin St.

The Seminole Hard Rock complex also maintains a job line at (813) 627-7875.

Fontana said it might not be long before even more hiring is required.

"If I were a betting man," Fontana said, "I'd say we'd be under construction again within 36 months."

Reporter Joe Humphrey can be reached at (813) 259-7691.

Credit: jhumphrey@tampatrib.com

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Abstract (Document Summary)

PHOTO (5C) MAP (C); Tribune photos by GARY RINGS (C) More than 2,500 people turned out for a job fair to seek positions with Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino. About 150 applicants were hired on Saturday.; [Daniel Shay] (C) New York native, who drove in from Fort Myers, was hired Saturday.; (C) [Bridget Davis] of Tampa, who is seeking part-time work, said the Hard Rock name drew her.; Tribune photos by GARY RINGS (C) Hundreds of applicants filled out paperwork and waited for a chance to receive a screening interview. The casino resort plans initially to hire 950 employees.; (C) General Manager [John Fontana] said hourly pay ranges from about $2.75 for servers to $7- $7.50 or $15-$18 for other workers.; Tribune map by CAITLIN HOPE WRIGHT (MAP) (C) Seminole Indian Reservation and Casino location

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