

VISA CAP LEAVES FIRMS WANTING; TEMPORARY JOBS MAY BE LEFT UNFILLED THIS SUMMER

San Jose Mercury News (California)

April 16, 2004 Friday MORNING FINAL EDITION

Copyright 2004 San Jose Mercury News All Rights Reserved

Section: BUSINESS; Pg. 3F

Length: 324 words

Byline: LISA GENTES, Associated Press

Dateline: PROVIDENCE, R.I.

Body

Jody Dyer is worried that she won't be able to rent all the rooms in her inn this summer because there won't be enough workers to clean them.

The Inn at Mystic, in Mystic, Conn., is short 16 seasonal employees because of a ceiling on a visa program that allows foreign nationals with various skills to work in the United States for nine months.

"We'll be open but we won't be to full capacity," Dyer said.

The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services cut off applications for this temporary visa program, the H-2B visa, on March 9 when the agency knew it would meet its annual limit of 66,000 foreign workers. With demand for workers surging -- the government already received more than 100,000 applications -- it was the first time the agency turned away applicants before the end of a fiscal year.

Now businesses from hotels in Rhode Island to the fishing industry in Alaska are short-handed and struggling to fill temporary jobs that local workers don't want.

Pennie Beach, co-owner of the Basin Harbor Club in Vergennes, Vt., said she's missing "a crucial core" of her 65 housekeepers and food service workers.

Employers usually turn to the H-2B program as a last resort; they must first recruit within the United States before they can turn to foreign workers. Foreign workers are paid the same wages Americans would be paid.

Gregory Siskind, an immigration lawyer in Memphis, noted that while the H-2B visa became more popular as the economy grew in recent years, the ceiling has not been changed since the program began in the early 1990s.

The carnival and circus industries in Florida are also being hit hard. Joe Nichols, an immigration attorney in Sanford, said local workers don't want these jobs because they require traveling.

Nichols said the visa ceiling is going to have a ripple effect: If some show owners are forced to close down fairs, then local vendors, hotels and restaurants also lose business.

Graphic

VISA CAP LEAVES FIRMS WANTING; TEMPORARY JOBS MAY BE LEFT UNFILLED THIS SUMMER

Photo;

PHOTO: VICTORIA AROCHO -- ASSOCIATED PRESS

Jody Dyer, owner of a hotel in Connecticut, says she may not be able to find enough workers to clean rooms this summer.

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Subject: SEASONAL WORKERS (90%); EMPLOYMENT VISAS (90%); FOREIGN LABOR (90%); IMMIGRATION (89%); TEMPORARY EMPLOYMENT (89%); HOTEL STAFF (78%); SERVICE WORKERS (77%); PASSPORTS & VISAS (77%); CITIZENSHIP (77%); WAGES & SALARIES (77%); WORKFORCE DEMAND (77%); ECONOMIC GROWTH (69%); LAWYERS (65%)

Company: BEACH CO INC (68%)

Organization: US CITIZENSHIP & IMMIGRATION SERVICES (57%)

Industry: HOTELS & MOTELS (89%); HOTEL HOUSEKEEPING (78%); HOTEL STAFF (78%); RESTAURANTS & FOOD SERVICE (72%); RESTAURANTS (72%); LAWYERS (65%)

Geographic: CONNECTICUT, USA (79%); FLORIDA, USA (79%); UNITED STATES (94%)

Load-Date: August 24, 2005