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Article published Apr 14, 2013

Casino developers tout job creation

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WORCESTER — At Mohegan Sun, if you can smile, you're hired.

Skills and experience are important, too, of course, but more important is how employees present themselves, especially to customers.

"We need people that are smiling and happy," said Don Trella, director of employee and guest experience. "We want them to create a memorable experience for our guests."

The explanation of the company's no-frowners-need-apply policy came at the DCU Center during a recent information session about working at Mohegan Sun.

The operators of the Connecticut casino are seeking a license to build another in Palmer, and they were in Worcester last week to tell residents about job opportunities in Palmer — even though the project is far from a certainty. Mohegan Sun is competing with three other companies for the sole license to build a resort casino in Western Massachusetts. The winner of that license is expected to be named early next year.

Peter Schultz, project coordinator for the Palmer casino, said it made sense for Mohegan to start talking about jobs so early in the process because jobs are on people's minds.

"People ask about it," he said. "Jobs is the No. 1 priority, overwhelmingly."

The promise of jobs is also an important marketing tool used by casino developers seeking support in communities where some residents may have concerns about other potential side effects of casinos, like traffic, addiction and crime.

Resort casino jobs include more than dealers and slot machine operators. They encompass accounting, finance, security, surveillance, sales, marketing, engineering and hotel and restaurant jobs.

"It's a little city," Mr. Trella said. "It's all these industries wrapped into one."

Salaries for casino workers can range, based on the job, from around minimum wage to much higher.

Ninety percent of workers in the U.S. gaming industry have less than a college degree, according to a 2009 study by researchers at the University of Massachusetts at Boston. The median wage for resort casino workers is about \$17 an hour, the study found.

A spokeswoman for Mohegan Sun said less than 1 percent of its 7,340 employees earn less than \$8.93 per hour.

Casino developers are promoting jobs through their websites, social media and at public meetings. Mohegan Sun's Palmer casino would create an estimated 2,400 jobs, possibly more. Its competitors pledge to create a similar number of jobs — Hard Rock Cafe International, which wants to build a casino in West Springfield, said it will create 2,000 full-time equivalents, while Penn National Gaming Inc.'s Springfield casino would include about 2,400 jobs, and the MGM Springfield casino would employ 3,000.

Developers of the Wynn casino proposed for Everett and the Suffolk Downs casino planned for Boston both say their projects would employ 4,000. Foxwoods, which is competing with those developers to build a casino in Milford, has not provided a jobs estimate for its project.

Worcester County residents theoretically could travel to work at casinos in either the eastern or western zone. There's also the potential for gambling jobs in Worcester. A subsidiary of Chicago-based Rush Street Gaming LLC is vying for a license to build a slots-only gambling parlor in Green Island. Without table games, it would be smaller than the resort casinos proposed for the Springfield and Boston areas. It would include up to 450 jobs.

"These jobs are very high-paying jobs with good benefits," Greg Carlin, chief executive officer of Rush Street Gaming, told the Telegram & Gazette last month. "At our casinos, if you add salary with benefits and tips, the average (pay) is between \$50,000 and \$60,000."

The Worcester slots parlor, if approved, wouldn't have dealers, but it would include many of the other jobs found at resort casinos, including cashiers, food servers and slot technicians.

For Ti Ferrelli of Sutton, the fact that gambling companies are already looking to hire is welcome news. She was laid off a year ago from her job as an executive assistant and office manager, and has been working unsteady temp jobs since.

After listening to Mohegan Sun's presentation in Worcester, Ms. Ferrelli, who has a master's degree, was ready to apply.

"At this point, all I want is a job," she said.

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