

Employment

Napa hospitality and restaurant career fair brings out job seekers

JENNIFER HUFFMAN jhuffman@napanews.com Mar 23, 2017



Gott's Roadside Manager Arely Guzman awaits job seekers at the hospitality and restaurant career fair Napa Hospitality Industry Partnership on Tuesday at Napa Valley Commons.

J.L. Sousa, Register

Jobs info:

Details of the Napa Hospitality Industry Partnership and a list of employers now hiring can be found at napahip.com

Hope Tompkins, manager of human resources for the CIA at Copia, is on the hunt – for employees.

Staffing a table at a hospitality and restaurant career fair held Tuesday at the Napa County Health and Human Services campus, Tompkins stood prepared to meet as many potential new staffers as she could.

The CIA is looking to hire bartenders, table hosts, pastry and line cooks, cocktail servers and other staff at its new campus in downtown Napa.

Tompkins said during the day-long job fair she hoped to talk to as many as 50 to 70 people.

“If I could leave here with 10 good leads, I’d be thrilled,” she said.

On Tuesday, more than 17 local hotels, restaurants and other companies participated in the career fair to raise awareness of hospitality career growth opportunities in the region and to hire for a wide range of open positions.

According to a news release from the employer-led Napa Hospitality Industry Partnership, in 2015, the tourism industry overall accounted for more than 12,500 jobs in Napa County, 17 percent of total jobs.

Jobs in Napa County’s lodging and restaurant industry have expanded by nearly 40 percent over the past five years, and growth is expected to continue as more hotels and restaurants come online in 2017, said the release.

Meanwhile, Napa's overall labor force has grown by only 6.4 percent.

Rapid growth, coupled with high cost of living and transportation issues in the area, have made it very difficult for businesses to find the workers they desperately need, said the release.

The biggest hurdle – especially for the service level positions – is the low applicant pool, Tompkins said.

“We often need to look to American Canyon, Vallejo and Vacaville” for candidates – and those willing to commute into Napa for those wages, she added.

Pay for select CIA jobs ranges from minimum wage (\$10.50 an hour) to as high as \$18 an hour, depending on position and experience.

“We're competitive in our wages but we have to get creative and think outside the box to attract talent,” said Tompkins.

The jobs event combined a traditional job fair featuring the usual employer booths and on-site interviews, coupled with additional services for job seekers, including information about hospitality career growth opportunities, resume review, interview coaching, Spanish-language support and information about continuing education offerings in the region.

The career fair was a collaborative effort of the employer-led Napa Hospitality Industry Partnership (Napa HIP) and a wide range of community and education partners, including Workforce Alliance of the North Bay, Napa Valley College, Napa Adult Education, Workforce Napa, and K-12 partners.

“We all have jobs available,” said Cheryl Velazquez, director of human resources at Embassy Suites Napa Valley, and a co-chair of the Napa HIP.

“In order to fill our individual needs, lodging and restaurants are collaborating efforts through this event. It's a win-win event for employers and job seekers,” said Velazquez.

The hardest jobs to fill are housekeeping and kitchen cook positions, Velazquez said. Housekeeping is a physically demanding job, she noted. And every hotel and restaurant needs cooks, so they are always a hot commodity.

To create a pipeline for new workers, one tactic the Embassy Suites plans to implement is an externship with chefs at the new Salvation Army Culinary Arts Training Program.

“As hospitality employers we have to take a proactive approach to addressing the challenges employers face in Napa,” said Tami Pacho, human resources manager at the Meritage Resort and Spa and one of the event organizers.

“By joining together as a team of hospitality professionals, our career and opportunity fair can address immediate needs such as staffing, as well as promote the hospitality industry as a career through educational and training experiences,” Pacho said.

Christine Carey of Napa walked into the job fair and almost immediately found herself interviewing for a hospitality job.

“I'm pleasantly surprised,” said Carey. “It's very organized,” she said of the fair. After being informed about the need for workers in the area, “I feel very optimistic about the job market,” she said.

Daniel Glantz, 27, also visited the job fair on Tuesday. Glantz hopes to one day start his own landscaping business and become an employer himself. Until then, he's looking for a job to pay the bills.

“I need a truck and tools,” he said. “You gotta save up” for the equipment.

“I’m thinking about working for a winery,” Glantz said. He’d like to earn at least \$12 an hour, he said.

Sarah DeNatale of Napa said she was also looking for work – in almost any industry except food, she noted. She currently volunteers at the animal shelter.

“I like working with pets,” said DeNatale.

While at the job fair, “I’m going to look around and see what pops up.” She’d like to earn \$20 an hour “but I’m flexible on that,” she said.

One woman, who asked not to have her name printed because she currently has another job, said the job fair was a great idea.

“It’s all in one place,” she noted. This job seeker said she’d like to explore a job working at the front desk of a hotel. “I’d like to get to know the community a little more,” and a job working with people interests her.

A group of students from Liberty and Chamberlin High Schools also attended the jobs event.

Xiomara Vazquez, a junior at Liberty High School, said she had a good feeling about the opportunities presented on Tuesday.

“I’m seeing a lot of hotels and restaurants” that are hiring, she said. “It makes me think I can get a job.”

Vazquez said she’s determined to find work. “If you really want something, you can do it.”

Cinthia Andrade is about to graduate from Liberty High School.

Andrade said she had a positive meeting with one hotel and thought there was a good chance she’d be offered a full-time job.

This 18-year-old said she was motivated to find work after leaving high school. “I want to have a good future,” she said.

Being encouraged by potential employers at the job fair left her feeling somewhat emotional, said Andrade. “People can see me working in their company,” she said. “That’s a good thing.”

Liberty High School teacher Jeff Scott said he brought 11 students to the job fair.

“A lot of students at our school are looking for jobs – mostly entry level positions,” Scott said. The fair is “a good way to get your foot in the door.”

Scott said the goal of the outing was for students to have a chance to meet at least three employers, set up future interviews “and get as many jobs as possible.”

Jennifer Huffman

Jennifer Huffman is the business editor and a general assignment reporter for the Napa Valley Register. I cover a wide variety of topics for the newspaper. I've been with the Register since 2005.