

Employer Testimonials on the SWT Program

Denise Beckson

Director of Operations/Human Resources

Morey's Piers & Beachfront Water Parks, Wildwood, New Jersey

We are a family-owned seasonal business operating on the North East coast of the country. We have been in business since 1969 and employ 140 full time staff and approximately 1500 summer workers. Of our seasonal staff 2/3 are United States citizens and 1/3 are participants in the U.S. Department of State Summer Work Travel (SWT) cultural exchange program.

We have participated in the SWT program since at least the mid-1980s and believe in the diplomacy opportunities the program creates. We primarily use this program because we cannot succeed

without it. We simply cannot fill all of our positions locally. If the program were eliminated or were to be significantly changed in a manner that decreased the number of J-1 students participating, it would have devastating effects on our business, the livelihood and jobs of our full-time employees, and our summer beach community. Our remote location, the small local population, and the fact that these positions are entry level seasonal jobs, contribute to our decision to participate in the SWT program. The ability to maintain enough seasonal staff through the J-1 program allows us to maintain our approximate 140 full time staff positions. The program is critical to our ability to invest and grow. SWT students are a valuable and beneficial addition to our workforce. A program reduction would have an impact up the line: we would buy less from our suppliers and vendors impacting their bottom line and potentially impacting their full time work staff. These students contribute to our company's overall success and our ability to employ local residents on a more permanent basis. They also contribute to the success of our community.

Simply put: we could not fully operate without these employees. There are simply too few local residents qualified and willing to work the entire summer to keep us operating at our full capacity. The number of local applicants does not meet our full hiring needs. Meaning, even if we hired everyone who walked through our door looking for a job, we would still be significantly short staffed. This severe lack of applicants is not a result of a failure to attempt to recruit Americans. We actively advertise employment opportunities through more than a dozen venues, including but certainly not limited to newspaper ads, online postings, social networking sites, and a wide array of outreach programs. We also regularly attend job fairs and have even hosted them. Furthermore, we actively pursue and initiate new and innovative means of reaching out to potential American employees. In fact, we



have an internal task force that solely focuses on American recruiting, we named this group DiRE (Domestic Recruiting Effort – and DiRE because that is the position we find ourselves in with regards to having enough local staff to fill our positions). Despite these great efforts, we consistently fail to attract a sufficient number of Americans to satisfy our employment needs.

Joe Eck
General Manager
Wilderness Hotel & Golf Resort, Wisconsin Dells, Wisconsin



The Wilderness Hotel & Golf Resort has been involved with the Summer Work & Travel (SWT) program since 1998. Currently we work with SWT students for three seasons. In the winter we employ approximately 215 students, spring 250 students, and summer 525 students for a total of 990 SWT students per year.

By utilizing the SWT program Wilderness is able to offer better customer service to all of our guests. Without the SWT participants it would be economically unfeasible for us to continue operations at our current level of service to all of our guests that they have come to expect and deserve. We would need to reduce hours of operations for outlets, restaurants, and waterparks. This in turn would

lower our customer service rating and drastically decrease revenue.

On a daily basis the SWT students work closely with domestic staff and our guests and therefore gain a better understanding of American culture. The students also communicate with the guests about where they are from as we list their country on the nametags. This serves as an icebreaker between the guests and participants. This simple interaction in turn helps the students improve their level of English and understanding of the English language.

The SWT program does NOT take away jobs from domestic staff as we never stop hiring. Currently we employ anywhere between 800 – 900 local domestic staff. Due to the seasonality and general nature of a waterpark resort our staffing numbers have a large variance between seasons. The combined population of Lake Delton/Wisconsin Dells has approximately 6,000 people. It has been estimated Lake Delton/Wisconsin Dells has approximately 12,500 full-time jobs to fill and approximately 3,965 of those are filled by SWT students. SWT workers help to fill an important gap with temporary seasonal positions as there are not enough people for all the positions. Additionally, we find that locals don't necessarily want these positions because they are seasonal in nature.

Dealing with the lack of staff and large influx of people is not just a Wisconsin Dells concern or even a hospitality issue. In all reality this is a tourism industry and losing the SWT program would have devastating effects on popular travel destinations. SWT students are utilized in Wisconsin Dells, Door County, Lake Geneva, Bayfield, Minocqua, Eagle River, along the Jersey Coast, and in Florida to name just a few.

In conclusion, this program is smart public policy as it facilitates global engagement. It's cost effective as it is privately funded and has no cost to taxpayers. Not to mention the billions of dollars it brings to the U.S. economy as students pay to be on the program, they spend money shopping in our malls for clothing, electronics, etc., and of course dine out. Lastly, it has a lasting positive impact as students engage with our local staff, our guests, and our community. This program is a win-win operation!

Chris Reda

Owner

Ropewalk Restaurant-Ocean City, Maryland

Roughly 2500 J-1 students keep the small beach town of Ocean City, MD, operational during the summer. With a year round population of 7,500 residents, there is no opportunity within the local workforce to staff the thousands of seasonal positions at restaurants, water parks, hotels, motels, and amusements.

Without J-1 participants, the weekend population of 200,000-500,000 tourists would be decimated in Ocean City, MD. The lines would be hours long, hotel rooms would not get serviced, and restaurants would not be able to keep up with the flow. Further, many of the hundreds of small family owned businesses operated by Americans would be forced to shut down as they would have no ability to operate motels, food stands, and amusements, thus causing hundreds of Americans to lose jobs that are supported by the J-1 program.



Further, the J-1 students that spend their Summers in Ocean City, MD add an invaluable element of culture and enthusiasm to the City. The shared multicultural backgrounds interact daily with both domestic employees and vacationers alike. Memories are shared, cultures are explored, traditions are learned, and lifelong friendships are created. Ocean City, MD, its vacationers, and local businesses are all better off with J-1 summer work/travel students here each Summer.