

All hands on deck for Aspen Skiing Co.

Skico employees pitching in to help make it to the end of the season

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ASPEN — Ever had a ski lesson from a company CEO?

Well, you just might if you head up to area mountains these days.

The usual push to fill end-of-season Aspen Skiing Co. jobs is compounded this year by the nationwide change in temporary worker visa rules.

As a result, everyone on the Aspen Skiing Co. staff is pitching in to keep the lifts running, the restaurants full of food, and finish out the ski season, said Skico spokesman Jeff Hanle.

“It’s not entirely unusual. We do this every year over the holidays,” Hanle said. But visa woes have compounded the problem, Hanle said.

Foreign workers, traditionally allowed to return year-after-year on H-2B temporary worker visas, were denied that right this year in an attempt at immigration reform by the U.S. Congress.

As a result, Skico was short of qualified, returning employees and the situation came to a head over the busy spring break holidays, Hanle said.

“We never have enough staff to cover the day-to-day,” Hanle said of peak times, calling this time of year the “toughest spring we’re going to see.”

During busy times, Skico brass regularly send out company-wide e-mails listing Skico operations in the biggest need, whether they are ski instructors, restaurant staff or people to unload buses.

In fact, office staff donned hair nets Friday to help out at the restaurant at the Treehouse, the new kid’s center at Snowmass.

And even company CEO Mike Kaplan dusted off his instructor’s skill-set to help out during a busy spring break.

“The office is pretty much empty,” said David Perry, Skico senior vice president — mountain division, who also is a certified professional instructor.

Suiting up to give lessons, Perry does not tell his students right away that he’s an executive, but students are surprised when he knows everybody on the hill.

“I think generally it’s positive,” Perry said. “It’s good for us to go out on the front lines.”

“Everyone signs up for shifts wherever they can,” Hanle said. “Everyone’s spent their time out there.”

Recently, some administrative staff members earned instructor certification to help with end-of-season gaps, Hanle said.

Having survived a big Easter weekend, Hanle said the company is in good shape to cover shifts.