



Vail Daily

VR wanted 1,900 visas

This year, ski company didn't get a lot of permits for foreign workers

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Vail, CO Colorado

VAIL, Colorado — This year, Vail Resorts sought to bring 1,900 seasonal workers to the country through the H-2B visa program, but “most” visas were not granted, a spokeswoman said Friday.

Spokeswoman Kelly Ladyga said a few visas for workers who start earlier in the season, such as snowmakers, were granted. She didn't say how many visas were granted, but, in 2007, Vail Resorts sought just 30 visas for snowmakers, according to federal records.

The additional details shed light on the extent of the company's visa problems, which stem from changes to federal immigration rules.

The 1,900 needed workers are for all five of the company's mountain resorts — Vail, Beaver Creek, Breckenridge, Keystone and Heavenly — as well as for hotels across country that the company owns and runs.

It's not clear how many of those jobs were in Eagle County.

A nationwide cap for H-2B visas was reached last week, before Vail Resorts was able to submit applications, said Mark Gasta, senior vice president and chief human resources officer for the company. A recently expired clause that allowed returning workers to be exempt from the nationwide cap of 66,000 means that many longtime Vail Resorts workers will not be able to return.

In 2007, Vail Resorts sought to bring more than 2,200 seasonal workers to the country through the H-2B visa program, according to federal records.

The needed employees included ski instructors, short-order cooks, lift operators, nursery school attendants and hotel clerks.

A U.S. Department of Labor Web site shows that Vail Resorts sought “labor certification” for 2,280 workers in 2007, an early step in getting H-2B seasonal visas.

In 2007, Vail Resorts said it needed:

- 738 ski instructors, with a proposed pay of \$9.06 to \$18.05 an hour.
- 251 short-order cooks, with a proposed pay of \$7.81 an hour.
- 242 lift operators, with a proposed pay of \$6.85 or \$6.32 an hour.
- 111 hotel clerks, with a proposed pay of \$8.78 an hour.
- 362 housekeepers, with a proposed pay of \$9.17 an hour.

After the “labor certification” is approved, applications for visas must be approved by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

Vail Resorts employs 15,000 people at the peak of the winter season. It will turn to other methods to recruit employees, including holding more job fairs nationwide, recruiting more at colleges and summer resorts such as Nantucket, creating a new Web site and turning to social-networking sites to find workers, the company said. It also hired a new director of recruiting.

Officials say they are confident the company will be well staffed come winter.

Maria Elena Garcia-Upson, a spokeswoman for the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, said 29,045 H-2B visas were granted in Colorado in the last fiscal year.

She said she was not allowed to disclose how many were granted to Vail Resorts because of privacy rules.

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