

Visa cut won't lead to wage bump

by **Curtis Wackerle**, Aspen Daily News Staff Writer

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Despite being short 200 seasonal worker visas for the upcoming winter season, the Aspen Skiing Co. isn't panicking.

It also isn't planning an across-the-board wage increase to encourage more domestic employees, whom the company knows it will need to make up the gap, according to SkiCo spokesman Jeff Hanle.

Due to cutbacks in the number of H-2B visas offered by the federal government, SkiCo is planning on 200 of the visas instead of its usual 400.

To compensate for the difference, Hanle said, the company is seeking to increase the number of foreign workers being admitted on J-1 visas, which can be used by students. Hanle said SkiCo attorneys are looking into the feasibility of the "Q" visa, a cultural exchange visa.

The company is also stepping up its recruitment efforts on college campuses, Hanle said: "We're doing everything we can to recruit domestically."

According to postings on the company's Web site, a starting lift operator at Snowmass is paid \$10 per hour with a \$1,500 bonus if he or she completes the season.

A new ski instructor working only during peak times, such as Christmas and Presidents' Day weekend, will be paid \$9 per hour plus any tips.

A maintenance worker's starting wage is \$11.50 per hour. A Buttermilk ski patroller job starts at \$12.90 an hour.

SkiCo wages are higher than workers can expect to earn at competing resorts. For example, that same lift operator in Vail earns \$9.50 per hour, in Breckenridge \$8.75 per hour and in Telluride \$9.50 per hour.

curtis@aspendedailynews.com