



Cape Facing Seasonal Worker Crisis

Businesses Caught In Struggle Over Guest Worker Visas

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BOSTON -- The kitchen of the famous Coonamessett Inn in Falmouth was a busy place at lunchtime Wednesday. Owner William Zammer expected it to get a lot busier as the tourist season approaches.

Zammer, who also owns the popular Flying Bridge restaurant and other businesses on Cape Cod, said he is scrambling to find more than 100 workers to fill jobs that used to go to foreign employees allowed in the country on H-2B visas.

"They're very, very valuable to us. This is not only me, but every restaurant throughout the Cape," said Zammer.

Waiter Rodger Troupe was an H-2B visa holder. Before he married an American citizen and moved here, Troupe would return to his native Jamaica and come back to his job at the Coonamessett year after year.

Because Congress has failed to renew an exemption on a national cap of H-2B visas, business owners all over the Cape are wringing their hands over what many consider a crisis.

"It's a travesty, what they're doing," said Zammer.

NewsCenter 5's Amalia Barreda reported that statistics from the Cape Cod Chamber of Commerce show 5,000 of the estimated 25,000 seasonal workers who used to come to the Cape every year were admitted on guest worker visas. The chamber said, without question, the workers remain crucial to the local economy.

Contrary to popular belief, employers stressed the workers have not displaced Americans.

"We simply do not have the labor force. This state is at full employment. Cape Cod is at full employment," said Zammer.

Like many other restaurant owners, Zammer added he has scoured the culinary schools looking for people. He is also trimming his menus and paying overtime to employees willing to work longer hours. He described it as making every attempt to make do with what he has, while maintaining a level of service to his customers.