

CRAIN'S DETROIT BUSINESS

Southeast Michigan's Premier Local Business News & Information Web site

Sep. 8, 2008

Grand Hotel president asks for renewed visa exemptions for workers

By [Sherri Begin](#)

Grand Hotel President Dan Musser was in Detroit today, visiting with media in an effort to drum up awareness and support for renewed an H-2B visa exemption for veteran, seasonal employees who've worked in the U.S. during the past three years.

Musser plans to travel to Washington, D.C. later this week, representing one of 3,000 companies meeting with the Michigan delegation to lobby for movement on legislation that would exempt returning, foreign seasonal employees from caps on the number of visas issued each year in the U.S.

Congress began exempting returning seasonal employees from the cap in 2004. But the exemption expired last September when it was tied into the immigration reform effort that failed to pass.

"The timing is important," Musser said. "We need action before the November recess."

Immigration matters, under which visas are lumped, won't be given the same priority by the new president as more pressing issues such as the economy, he said.

Like many other Northern Michigan retreats, the Mackinac Island hotel is heavily dependent on foreign, seasonal workers, many of whom have returned each spring for more than a decade, Musser said.

In 2007, the hotel employed about 300 foreign employees to supplement an equal number of U.S. employees, he said. In 2008, it had about 200 foreign employees.

Without a renewed exemption for workers, the Grand has had to recruit employees from other resorts and hotels across the U.S., he said. Those employees don't offer the same caliber of service the Grand's guests have come to expect, he said, due to abbreviated training. And they can't handle the same workload as the hotel's veteran, foreign employees, which means the hotel is having to hire more employees to do handle the same amount of work.

"Good service is a cornerstone of the Grand Hotel," Musser said. "If we erode that, we'll be in trouble."

Musser said representatives from a number of other Northern Michigan companies were expected to join him in Washington, including others from Mackinac Island such as the **Island House**, **Ryba's Fudge and Carriage Tours**, **Boyne Mountain** and **Boyne Highlands**.