

# The Washington Post

The Lifeguards

## New Pool of Overseas Staff

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Geil Vidal's life was all books and calculations at home in [Lima, Peru](#), where she was studying mechanical engineering and writing a thesis. Here, atop a Connecticut Avenue apartment building, the 23-year-old sits poolside beneath a tabletop umbrella, green [iPod](#) nearby, feet donning [J. Crew](#) flip-flops.

A few miles away, Bulgarian Todor Markov, 29, watches children splash in a pool at the [Marriott Wardman Park Hotel](#). Markov, who immigrated last year with the help of a relative who sponsored his U.S. residency, reclines in the deck chair contemplating when he will attempt the U.S. veterinary exam to make use of the degree he attained back home.

They are two of more than 200 foreign lifeguards employed by High Sierra Pools, a management company based in [Arlington](#). Steve Lavery, the company's general manager, said that 12 years ago, American college and high school students held these jobs. Those were the days of summer breaks that lasted until Labor Day and before worries of skin cancer and uber-competitive college admissions kept American teens out of lifeguard stands.

Most of the foreign lifeguards work 12-hour days and enter the country on J-1 visas, which allow foreign students to work here temporarily. The visa's stated intent is to expose foreigners to life in the United States, building up global goodwill. It has come to be used to fill many service-sector jobs that U.S. employers claim American teenagers won't take. Lifeguarding is near the top of the list, Lavery said.

"The only Americans we ever hire are basically guys that live with their parents," Lavery said, laughing.

His first international hire was a German woman; Poles and Bulgarians followed. Lavery has begun sending recruiters to [Kazakhstan](#), [Peru](#) and [Brazil](#). The company has staff members recruiting in 15 countries.

Vidal hopes to return to [Lima](#) at the end of the year with at least \$2,000 in earnings.

Next year will be her last as a lifeguard. "I want to work for an aeronautical company," she said.

