



Visa Crunch Puts Businesses In Bind

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NEWPORT, R.I. - Life moves at a slower pace in Newport in February.

But area hotels, restaurants and shops are gearing up for the busy season. They rely on seasonal workers from abroad.

However, getting them to Newport this year is proving to be a challenge.

The national cap of 66,000 temporary non-immigrant or H2B visas has been reached and an exemption that allows seasonal workers who've worked in the country before to return without an H2B visa expired last September.

"Without these folks it is absolutely harder because not only do we bring in 20 H2B workers, all of the other hotels bring in H2B visa workers as well," said Newport Harbor Hotel and Marina General Manager Ted Schroeder.

Schroeder said he relies on the seasonal workers to fill housekeeping, bartending and front-desk positions.

"They come as we start getting really busy, and leave when it gets really slow. So seasonally, these folks fit the bill perfectly," he said.

The Rhode Island Hospitality and Tourism Association is working with the state's congressional delegation to help bring relief to the H2B visa crunch.

However, Dale Venturini said it maybe too late.

"Anytime we talk to our congressional delegation they are supportive of our issue, but they are very concerned that we might not get the extension passed for this year's season," she said.

Venturini said they are looking at other alternatives.

"We're working with our Providence people trying to find out if we can 'borrow' employees," she said. "We'll see if that happens."

Venturini said businesses always look to hire local workers first to fill seasonal positions, but she said they just can't find them.