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# Casinos, other businesses fight for workers amid tight Vegas labor market

By [Bryan Horwath](#) ([contact](#))

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Before the coronavirus pandemic, Elaine Davis of Las Vegas worked as a home health specialist, caring for developmentally disabled clients.

Davis said she enjoyed the work, which she did for more than 20 years. Then COVID-19 hit, and Davis, 55, caught the virus, landing her in the hospital.

Davis fully recovered, but when she decided it was time to get back to work, she found that she wanted something different.

That's why she attended a hiring fair last month at the Plaza in downtown Las Vegas.

Quick with a smile and with personality to spare, Davis was among a dozen or so people waiting to be interviewed for positions ranging from bartender, food server, dealer, cocktail server, pool attendant, security officer and barista. The property was looking for about 60 people.

Davis is still waiting to hear back for a hostess position, but she's hopeful she will get the job.

"I feel like I was reborn," Davis said. "It's like I'm coming back to life, and I decided I wanted to be around people more. There are always a lot of people at casinos, so I figured that would be a good place to work."

"If it doesn't work out, I'll still be on the trail," Davis said. "I'm ready to get out there again."

As more people get vaccinated against COVID-19, Las Vegas is inching closer to re-emerging as the tourism powerhouse it was before the pandemic. Casinos are busier and staffing up again.

Tens of thousands of casino workers around Las Vegas were laid off last year because of the pandemic. Casinos were closed in mid-March and were not allowed to reopen until June 4.

In the past three weeks, the Plaza, Circa Las Vegas, MGM Resorts International, the Strat, El Cortez and the Cosmopolitan have all hosted job events.

Las Vegas resorts called back thousands of workers furloughed or laid off during the pandemic, but more than a [dozen](#) have moved on or moved away.

Recent changes in the industry have changed since the pandemic,” said Beatrice Vattima, executive director of the Plaza. “We have recalled quite a few of our team members. When you’re recalling, if someone moved away or they’ve gotten another position, then that leaves a position open. That’s really what we have open now.”

During a normal year, the Plaza hosts job fairs, often for seasonal-type positions, Vattima said. The climate this spring, however, is different, she said.

There is more demand, absolutely,” Vattima said.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Las Vegas metro area — home to about 2.2 million people — lost about 129,000 jobs between March 2020 and this March, a loss of more than 12% of the workforce.

In January 2020, more than 61,000 people worked at Las Vegas Strip casino resorts, according to the Center for Gaming Research. Nearly all those jobs went dormant for over two months last spring when the state mandated casinos close to help curb the spread of the virus.

About 50,000 people worked for MGM Resorts at its nine Strip resorts and at T-Mobile Arena before the pandemic hit.

An MGM spokeswoman declined to say how many employees MGM has today in Las Vegas, noting the company “continues to hire every day.”

Last week, MGM, the largest private employer in Nevada, hosted a three-day hiring fair at Mandalay Bay to fill everything from guest room attendant to retail positions.

Randy Goldberg, MGM’s vice president of talent acquisition, said the company hosted several smaller job fairs this year leading up to the Mandalay Bay event.

On May 6, about 1,500 to 2,000 jobseekers showed up to the hiring event at Mandalay Bay, Goldberg said.

“We saw that Las Vegas was ramping up in March,” Goldberg said. “We need people to clean rooms; we need people to work in our restaurants. People who were furloughed last year, we’ve been calling them.”

In the COVID-19 economy, MGM has had to look at what kind of benefits it offers its employees differently, Goldberg said. For instance, the company now offers daycare options for Strip employees, he said.

As of Friday, the national unemployment rate was 6.1%, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, lower than the Nevada rate, which is hovering around 8%.

Goldberg said the uncertain times surrounding the pandemic mean there are a lot of variables that could be at play when people consider going back to work or changing jobs.

“Maybe a person is taking care of someone else and they don’t want to take the chance of bringing the virus back. There’s child care to think about,” he said.

The El Cortez in downtown Las Vegas was looking to hire about 60 people at a recent job fair but was only able to fill about 20 positions, a spokeswoman said.

Some other industries are also having trouble filling vacant positions.

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