

Attracting the Right Staff to Seasonal Attractions

Finding the right staff for any business can be a challenge but when your business is seasonal and a bit off the beaten track, it can be even harder. The Asessippi Ski Area & Winter Park has become a popular ski and snowboarding destination since it opened in 2000. The biggest challenge, however, has been staffing.

“Finding the right staff isn’t just about offering one thing,” says Willie Pont, General Manager. “You need to offer career development and an environment that is fun. You really need to sell to an employee what you are selling to customers.”

Asessippi recently hired a human resources person to enhance the resort’s current staffing approach. The focus of the HR role will be to gather information and resources to help Asessippi develop staffing procedures for training and help retain staff from year to year.

“Our biggest hurdle is being seasonal. We are trying to develop the resort into a year-round destination which will make it easier to attract and keep staff,” Pont adds.

Unlike larger resorts who can offer accommodations to employees, Asessippi has found other ways to entice and compensate employees. In addition to creating a fun atmosphere in which to work, the resort offers a premium wage to those who have to work outside in the cold. Lift operators also have coffee makers in the lift shacks. All employees enjoy a meal program with free soup and beverages as well as a season’s pass to use the hills.

“Younger workers like the seasonal pass and parents like it because they know their kids are at a safe place and will be on the hill skiing or boarding once their shift is over,” Pont says.

Asessippi retains about eight management employees throughout the year, with 130 to 140 employees during the ski season. Asessippi has been successful in recruiting staff to date, many of whom return for the next season, it is becoming more difficult and the resort will have to become more competitive. One way they try to be competitive is by being flexible in scheduling. Full-time workers, for example, can expect to have at least one weekend off a month through the winter. Asessippi also accommodates staff who play on the local junior hockey team. Their shifts are designed to allow them to get to their practices or games.

Asessippi’s location in an agricultural region has proven advantageous. Pont has found a ready labour pool from the farm community. Seniors also are becoming a potentially growing source of workers who are looking for something to do.

While ongoing training is becoming even more important, Asessippi’s training already is an integral part of the environment. All new staff are given an orientation session and receive job-specific training. The training focuses on customer service, conflict resolution, career development, self-wellness, and employee-employer relations.

“In the end, it’s not just about money. Working here is about enjoying it and the lifestyle it offers in this environment,” Pont concludes.