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Job fair for Uptown restaurant draws hundreds of applicants

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RACINE - A job fair Tuesday offering about 40 part-time restaurant jobs drew more than 10 times that many people.

Job-seekers lined up early, and 436 people applied for work at the soon-to-open Gerald's Smokehouse Cuisine, 1501 Washington Ave. With that response, almost 10 of every 11 people will miss out.

Tina Delarosa of Kenosha thought she might be one of the fortunate ones. She started her day at 9 a.m. at the Kenosha County Job Center.

By 9:05 a.m., Delarosa was out the door and on her way to the Racine County Workforce Development Center, 1717 Taylor Ave.

By noon, the Kenosha resident had encouragement.

"They said they will call me in within five days," said Delarosa, 33, a single mother of three and a business student at Cardinal Stritch University. She wants 30 hours of work per week.

Bester's managers did the screening, and they evidently liked Delarosa's paralegal background and schooling when she interviewed for an administrative job.

"I have a lot of ambition, so I need to use that," she remarked.

But restaurant owner Gerald Bester, 42, of Racine said no one left the job fair with a job guaranteed.

"We're not doing any hiring on the spot," he said. "We want to make sure they fit, all the way from dishwasher to management."

About 70 people will be called in for final interviews, and about half will be hired, said Bester, an independent trucking contractor operating as Dynamite 1 Trucking Co. The rest will be called next as openings arise.

The job fair was set to begin at 9 a.m. By 7:30 a.m., there was a line out the front doors at the Workforce Development Center.

That response level is not uncommon when a job fair involves many jobs of various types and skill levels, said Jane Kurylo, Center team leader for business services.

Many applicants were culled early, Bester said - either during background checks or by showing up sloppily dressed.

A notice posted in the hallway outlined what he wanted: an outgoing personality; professional demeanor; and ability to provide exceptional customer service.

Anyone who shuffled in looking slovenly wasn't latching on with Gerald's, said Bester, who plans to open his upscale restaurant in early June.

He has had his core staff of managers in place months. The job fair was held to fill cooking, valet parking, security, busing and dishwashing positions of 15 to 35 hours per week.

Benito Rodriguez, 34, of Caledonia sought a cook position - stressing his 17 years of cooking experience - and said his interview went "super."

Rodriguez works 40 hours a week at a Mukwonago restaurant and hopes to add part-time work at Gerald's.

Bester said the job fair was successful and the response overwhelming.

"I'm confident, with these applicants, we will be able to staff the restaurant."