

Groton - Eager for a fresh start or merely hedging their bets, they were either out of work or feared they might soon be. Casino jobs in a growing market held promise.

Less than three weeks after Mohegan Sun laid off hundreds of employees, including some table-games supervisors, and six weeks after Foxwoods Resort Casino

cut 40 jobs in a reorganization of its table-games department, a Bensalem, Pa., casino launched a two-day job fair Friday at the Mystic Marriott, searching for experienced dealers to staff its new gaming tables.

For the locals, Parx Casino's presence was fortuitous.

"It's ironic that they should show up two weeks after the layoffs," said Robert Williams of Bozrah, who lost his job in the Mohegan Sun downsizing. He'd worked at the Uncasville casino for 13½ years and spent a couple of years at Foxwoods before that.

"I've made it my career. It's my passion," he said, filling out an application.

Williams said he'd prefer to find work in southeastern Connecticut, where the casinos have been battling recessionary trends for the better part of three years, but thinks he might be better off in Pennsylvania.

"Anytime you have a newer casino, you're going to have a lot of new play," he said. "For the first three or four years, it's going to be very busy."

Written by Administrator

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Gaming revenues at Pennsylvania's nine casinos (a tenth, Philadelphia's SugarHouse, opened last week), have grown every year since slot machines debuted in 2006. Table games were added for the first time this summer, boosting revenues further.

Parx, located just north of Philadelphia, hired nearly 400 people to staff 57 table games, including baccarat, blackjack, craps and roulette. The games generated more than \$11 million in the first eight weeks.

Parx now needs to hire 300 to 400 more dealers, including 80 with supervisory experience, as it prepares to open a 24-table poker room in November and add 50 more table games by the end of the year, according to Ari Mizrachi, the casino's director of table games. Parx hopes to fill 10 to 15 percent of those positions during the job fair.

By 11 a.m. Friday, 90 minutes into the fair, about 60 candidates had visited the Parx desk outside a Mystic Marriott ballroom. Mizrachi described the field as a roughly even mix of those working and those out of work. Virtually all of the candidates had worked or were working for one of the local casinos.

In searching for experienced dealers, "Atlantic City and Connecticut are the only two markets you can tap into," said Mizrachi, whose own casino career began at Foxwoods, where he was a poker dealer in 2002 and 2003. If Parx's hiring here coincides with layoffs at Mohegan Sun and Foxwoods, it's strictly a coincidence, he said.

Several job-fair attendees said they were dealers at Mohegan Sun and felt none too secure about their futures there. None would give their name.

Among Mohegan Sun dealers, there's a feeling that "we could be next," one woman said. "Everyone's walking on eggshells." A Mohegan Sun supervisor who noted that he's worked

there since it opened said he and a companion who also works there were "hedging our bets" in investigating opportunities at Parx. He said they were concerned about the prospect of further layoffs at Mohegan Sun.

Candy McDermott of Mystic, an executive host at MGM Grand at Foxwoods, said her husband was a floor supervisor at Foxwoods, where he's worked since "day one."

"We've checked it out," McDermott said of Parx. "We have family down there and we'd like to start a new future in Pennsylvania."

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