

Boston restaurants feel pinch from Encore Boston Harbor casino's hiring – Boston Herald

Written by Administrator
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Encore Boston Harbor's huge hiring spree is squeezing an already tight restaurant labor market, yanking workers from Boston bars and restaurants and stirring fears that local spots will close under the pressure.

"We already had issues with finding staff — the casino has added a whole other dimension to it," said Mark D'Alessandro, the general manager of Mistral and operations manager for the Columbus Restaurant Group.

Restaurateurs say Boston's strong economy in recent years already had left scant pickings for hires even before Encore opened in Everett in late June, ramping up hiring to over 5,000 hospitality workers. Massachusetts Restaurant Association chief Bob Luz noted recent high-profile restaurant closures, including Boston landmark Durgin-Park — and said his members tell him they worry that trend will continue.

"That's one of the fears that we have," Luz said, saying that restaurants begin to pay people more and, "You reach a breaking point because you can't just keep passing it onto the consumer."

Glynn Hospitality operations manager Sheldon Cohen said the nine restaurants his company owns have seen more than 10 bartenders and cooks leave.

"The casino just drove the cost right up," said Cohen, whose company owns Coogan's, The Black Rose and Clery's.

He said restaurants are having to "re-recruit" their current employees, sometimes paying more — which means prices will go up, too.

"The operators having to pay more have to charge more," Cohen told the Herald.

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Luz said the casino has been respectful to existing businesses, and is not resorting to underhanded tactics to poach people from local restaurants. But hiring 5,000-plus people — an unprecedented number in modern Boston history, he said — inevitably tightens the market.

“It’s clearly been a disruptive force,” Luz told the Herald.

Encore itself has had little problem getting applicants.

“We received 135,000 applications for positions within the resort and are pleased with the caliber of candidates that we have been able to attract,” spokeswoman Rosie Salisbury told the Herald.

Salisbury said the resort casino has hired 5,200 people and is looking for about 200 more, with the upcoming hires largely being table-game dealers.

D’Alessandro, the Mistral GM, said his restaurant group, which also owns Moo... and Ostra, in the past just got new hires through networking, but now has to take out job ads on websites.

“In years past we did very little advertising for staff,” D’Alessandro said. “We’re thinking about going to headhunters now.”

Beantown Pub general manager Ryan Shanley noted that the casino’s opening comes as the Seaport district continues its transformation into a hot spot for restaurants, bars and clubs. He said he’s heard of quite a few bar and restaurant managers heading to Encore.

Shanley said his restaurant hasn’t been hit hard with people leaving — but finding workers has been and remains “one of more difficult things that we do.”

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“We’re generally looking for help on a 365-day-a-year basis,” Shanley said.

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