

Job fair fills casino slots

Turnout for chances at openings at Pechanga Resort exceeds expectations

By JONATHAN SHIKES / *The Press-Enterprise*

Brandie Miller showed up at the Pechanga Resort & Casino job fair Monday looking to go back to work after a year off taking care of her young daughter.

She left with a job as a cocktail waitress.

"I have heard a lot of good things about Pechanga," said Miller, who is 28 and lives in Hemet. "This was a good opportunity to get an interview."



David Bauman / *The Press-Enterprise*

Applicant Brandie Miller of Hemet, left, discusses a cocktail-server position at the Pechanga Resort & Casino near Temecula with Ron Kerere, the assistant beverage manager, during the job fair. Pechanga is lining up staffing for a new wing it plans to open in November.

resources manager. "I didn't think there were this many people in this area."

In November, the resort will open a 100,000-square-foot wing, a two-story bar and restaurant, among other improvements. To be ready, Pechanga is hiring for almost every position, from housekeepers to poker dealers, valets to slot mechanics.

"We've had so many really qualified applicants, people who have been with their current employers six or seven years," Allen said. "To have that means we've crossed into a new area in terms of applicants."

Miller was one of about 2,500 people who descended on the casino Monday, carrying resumes and their best smiles. Not all of them were hired on the spot, like Miller, but most got at least a chance to interview for one of 1,750 open jobs.

The turnout was so high, in fact, that many applicants spent hours in lines that ran all the way up the hallway outside the casino's grand ballroom.

The response surprised the organizers of the fair, which began Sunday and will continue today from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. at the Temecula-area gaming hall.

"I'm absolutely overwhelmed and excited," said Lucy Allen, Pechanga's human

By the time the new wing opens, the resort will have around 5,000 employees, making it Riverside County's second-largest private employer behind Stater Bros. Guidant, which employees about 3,000 workers in Temecula, currently holds the No. 2 position.

Kathy Michels, a Winchester resident, said Pechanga is also one of the better-paying employers.

"They pay a livable wage, versus survival pay," said Michels, who attended the job fair with three friends. "That's great, considering rent has gone sky high."

Michels, who applied for a job as a slot mechanic, used to work for the Soboba Casino near San Jacinto, but she said Pechanga is "more classy."

Employment by California Indian tribes reached 44,400 in June, a 17 percent increase over the previous year. It has also been one of the state's fastest-growing employment sectors, recording double-digit growth for the past three years.

In Cabazon, the Morongo Band of Mission Indians plans to hire at least 1,000 people by the end of the year as it opens a new casino and a 23-story hotel.

The Fantasy Springs Casino in Indio, which will open a 12-story hotel and expanded casino in December, and the San Manuel Casino in Highland, which is building an enormous new facility, also plan to hire several hundred employees each.

Elizabeth Borroel of Sun City, who was attending her first job fair, said she didn't expect the long lines she encountered at 9 a.m.

Nearly four hours later, she was still waiting to interview for a position as a greeter, a job that entails helping people on bus tours orient themselves to the casino.

Borroel, 23, had planned to apply for a position as a cocktail server, but she changed her mind after reading a booklet that listed the various types of jobs available at Pechanga and talking to an on-site counselor.

"It sounded more interesting than just walking the floor," she said.

Peter Villalobos, a Riverside resident, said he planned to apply for a job as a restaurant or casino floor manager. Although he has never worked in a gaming hall before, he has fast-food restaurant management experience in Arizona.

"It's a good drive from Riverside," he said while waiting in line. "But if you get the right job, it's worth it."

By the end of the day, the casino and the firm it had hired to help with the job fair had processed about 2,500 applications and decided to extend the job fair's hours today, according to casino spokeswoman Ciara Coyle.

"They had to cut the line off today at around 3 p.m.," Coyle said Monday, "because if they hadn't, they would have been there until midnight processing applications."