

It's boom time in Maryland for casino hiring, with Horseshoe opening this summer

Written by Administrator

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It was just after 9 o'clock one recent morning in Baltimore, and Kanika Feaster was getting the group primed and pumped for work — or at least, primed to *apply* for work at the giant gambling palace being built downtown.

It's an employment jackpot, advertising hundreds of jobs in a city that is starved for them.

"We're looking for 1,700 people," Feaster said in a meeting room near Morgan State University. "That's how many jobs we have."

A buzz swept through the room. Feaster repeated herself: "Seven. Teen. Hundred."

Maryland's fifth casino isn't scheduled to open until the end of the summer, but company representatives have been hustling at a breakneck pace to spread the help-wanted word across Baltimore.

Horseshoe Casino officials have promised to concentrate their hiring efforts in and around the city, which has one of the state's highest unemployment rates: 8.5 percent. They've been promoting their efforts accordingly: The casino had 55 employment events last month, including several stops on a tour through Baltimore's 14 government districts, plus meetings with veterans, seniors, [even churchgoers](#) .

There are 83 more events scheduled for the rest of this month and April, all in an effort to line up enough qualified candidates to fill 1,700 jobs before the Horseshoe opens in August or September.

It won't necessarily be easy, as casino executives 15 minutes down the Baltimore-Washington Parkway can tell them. Maryland Live is scrambling to fill hundreds of jobs, many in its dealer ranks, which officials expect to take a hit once Horseshoe begins hiring. To prepare for an employee exodus — and also for an expansion, with 12 additional tables coming to the [bustling Arundel Mills casino](#)

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this spring — Maryland Live is redoubling its recruitment efforts and reopening [its dealer school](#) in April, offering free tuition to at least 200 students.

The Horseshoe's own quest for good help continues this weekend at the Baltimore Convention Center, where 100 supervisors from other Caesars Entertainment casinos will help screen invited applicants for dealer school.

Ultimately, the new casino will need between 500 and 600 dealers to work the blackjack, roulette and craps tables; the majority will be rookies — new graduates of the free, 12-week training academy coming soon to a building two blocks from the construction site, in the shadow of M&T Bank Stadium.

"It's where our biggest push is right now, because the positions take the longest to get trained," said Chad Barnhill, Horseshoe Baltimore's senior vice president and general manager. "It's also one of the most lucrative front-line positions on the casino floor."

Barnhill declined to say what dealers might expect to make at Horseshoe, which will have at least 100 tables and a World Series of Poker-branded card room.

But officials at Maryland Live have said their full-time dealers, who number around 1,000, can make \$45,000 to \$55,000 per year, including tips.

"We have a lot of openings and anticipate having more," said Rob Norton, Maryland Live's president and general manager. "We're looking at it with our eyes wide open. There are going to be some people who are going to find it more convenient to work at Horseshoe Baltimore. It's just one of the many jobs we're actively recruiting for."

All told, Maryland Live is hiring for [more than 80 different roles](#), some of which have multiple positions open. There are security jobs, "party starter" jobs, steakhouse jobs. There are jobs in finance, in the cashier cage, in marketing, in slots, [in the secret surveillance bunker](#)

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, even in human resources itself.

Part of the problem, Norton said, is a turnover rate that's high even in an industry known for churn. People make quick money and quit, or they find the jobs too demanding and quit.

"The number one reason we have for defection is people have the concept that working in a casino is all partying and glitz and glamour, money and fame, if you will," Norton said. "The reality is, this is hard work."

Even with the openings, Maryland Live's employee count has soared from about 750, before becoming a 24-hour casino in late 2012, to more than 2,800 now, Norton said.

Job creation is one of the go-to pitches — just behind tax revenue — for gambling supporters and operators when they're trying to get casinos legalized or licensed. Statewide, more than 4,800 people are licensed to work in gambling and non-gambling casino jobs, according to the Maryland Lottery and Gaming Control Agency. The agency's licensing division is bracing for a surge in applications this year, but it will seem minor compared with what's coming in 2016, when [MGM National Harbor opens](#) with about 4,000 employees.

For now, the focus is on Baltimore, where one day in late February Barnhill put on a hard hat and a pair of safety glasses, then stepped through a temporary door into a structure that will eventually be transformed into a casino.

Where most of the 2,500 slot machines will be, there were stacks of insulation. Instead of chiming machines, there was hammering and sawing and the *beep-beep-beep* of scissor lifts warning workers to get out of the way. There were no surveillance cameras up high, just guys installing ceiling grid.

"This thing is going to be open soon," Barnhill promised as contractors scurried about.

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The \$442 million project is creating about 2,000 temporary construction jobs; crews are working six and seven days a week, two shifts per day, around the 335,000-square-foot property. As the building progresses, Horseshoe executives are sprinting at full speed, trying to build a staff from scratch.

The local workforce, Barnhill said, has to be educated about what jobs are available, what casino work is actually like (long hours, mostly on your feet, in a noisy place that never closes) and what the casino is looking for in prospective employees.

“We’re looking for the right personality and a positive attitude more than we’re looking for experience,” said Barnhill, who has about 20 people on staff — a few senior executives “plus a pretty healthy human resources team.”

Already, the casino has received more than 7,500 applications, about 60 percent from Baltimoreans, Barnhill said. “We’re Baltimore city’s casino. One of the best things we can do is have people working here who understand Baltimore and know Baltimore.”

Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake has [called the recruitment efforts unprecedented](#) .

The casino has even funded a temporary recruitment position through the Mayor’s Office of Employment Development, a job that went to Feaster, whose mission now is to find qualified city residents (at least 21, with a high school diploma or GED, able to pass a drug test and no gambling offenses or crimes of moral turpitude [in the past seven years](#)).

Technically, Feaster is a city employee. But at the event near Morgan State, she wore a purple polo shirt emblazoned with the Horseshoe Casino logo — and she talked the Horseshoe talk.

“We put the swagger in customer service,” she said.

“We’re looking for people with lots of personality,” she said.

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"We want to be the best place to work," she said.

And then, she said: "I told you we have 1,700 jobs, right?"

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