

# **Strong Workforce Program Hospitality, Culinary and Tourism Regional Workforce Advisory Meeting Proceedings April 22, 2022 Virtual - Zoom**

## **Introduction**

The Los Rios Community College District, in partnership with Valley Vision, and in collaboration with Sierra College and Yuba Community College District, invests Strong Workforce funding to organize and convene Regional Advisories. The objectives of the Regional Advisories are to build strong relationships between employers, educators, and workforce that:

- Provide timely information on skills gaps and workforce needs, informing partners on major industry trend information;
- Improve the efficiency of the advisory process for educators and employers;
- Reflect a regional view of workforce needs and assets;
- Provide opportunities for more systemic, ongoing engagement that includes workforce partners in key industry sectors.

Regional Advisory meetings help inform decisions on needed investments and enhancements for Career Education (CE) programs to help fill the growing demand for middle-skill positions. This meeting proceedings report includes key findings, best practices, and minutes from the Spring 2022 Regional Advisory meeting focused specifically on careers in Hospitality, Culinary and Tourism (HCT).

Valley Vision supports a robust talent pipeline through our multiple 21st Century Workforce initiatives. We prepare our regional workforce for the future by addressing skills gaps, advancing research, aligning efforts and strengthening systems. Valley Vision's workforce efforts are supported by the Sacramento Employment and Training Agency (SETA), Golden Sierra Workforce Development Board (WDB), North Central Counties Consortium, Yolo WDB, City of Sacramento, local community college districts and others.

The Strong Workforce program provides Career Education opportunities to increase social mobility and fuel regional economies with skilled workers.

## Key Findings

- The HCT sector bore the brunt of the economic effects of the COVID 19 pandemic. The sector lost over half of the jobs and is still in the recovery phase with little growth since March 2020. Although the industry has recovered 40% of the jobs lost, it has not reached pre-pandemic employment levels. Labor Market Information indicates that the industry is likely going through a restructuring phase with a large number of employees leaving the sector altogether.
- Hourly wages have increased nationally across the industry by about three dollars per hour. Additionally, higher-earning opportunities exist at the management level. Labor market data shows that the highest earnings potential positions include General and Operations Managers, Food Service Managers, Personal Service Managers, Entertainment and Recreation Managers, Chefs, and Head Cooks.
- As businesses adapted to operating during the pandemic, it became evident that establishing a footprint in the community was pivotal to helping businesses attract customers. One way to connect to the community was to have an active social media presence and as a result, opportunities arose for entry-level staff to leverage their social media skills in positions that offered professional growth.
- The employee shortage has forced businesses to adapt new hiring and retention strategies. For example, managers are more willing to accept employees' shift preferences because it has become challenging to have adequate staff to maintain business operations on all shifts. Some businesses have created career advancement opportunities and training programs to prepare employees for professional growth opportunities. Employers are also offering hiring bonuses for new hires.
- The leisure and hospitality industry is unique in the sense that it helps connect people and enhances the quality of life. The COVID 19 pandemic reinforced the importance of human interaction. To that end, hiring managers are looking for qualified individuals who value creating a hospitable environment for customers. They look for individuals with cultural awareness and superior communication skills to carry on a conversation with patrons and be good listeners. They also look for candidates who can demonstrate the ability to empathize and show care and compassion to customers and their fellow workmates. Collaborative skills and flexibility skills are also highly desired as priorities constantly shift in the workplace.
- In the panel discussion, the Hospitality, Culinary and Tourism sector was described as an art and lifestyle. It is a good fit for innovative and creative people who have the knack for creating a unique experience for customers. Additionally, positions in the industry are dynamic and include both public-facing and non-interactive roles. The day to day variety of experiences of working in this sector can be a draw to attract creatives to these positions.

## Meeting Proceedings

### Welcome and Introduction

Michael Frigm, Professor of Culinary Arts Management at Cosumnes River College, welcomed attendees and acknowledged the keynote speaker and industry panelists. He spoke about how the collaborative effort between colleges and employers provides quality and relevant workforce training for individuals interested in working in the Hospitality, Culinary, and Tourism sector.

### Keynote Speaker

Marc Sapoznik, President & CEO of Rancho Cordova Travel and Tourism, highlighted the fact that the hospitality, culinary, and tourism industry was hit hardest by the COVID 19 pandemic and hasn't fully recovered. Despite financial help from the government to help pay employees' wages, the industry saw significant job losses. He stated that data from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics showed that the industry is still 9% below pre-pandemic levels of employment. The sector currently accounts for more than 7 in 10 jobs lost. The perception of the industry, both employee experiences and public/consumer interaction, has contributed to its slow recovery since the pandemic. Employees who left the industry cited instability of wages and tips, safer working conditions, better hours, and better interactions with the public/customer, in comparison to other industries, as reasons for leaving the sector.

Despite these challenges, Marc highlighted that the HCT sector has viable and rewarding employment opportunities for individuals with a passion for creating great service experiences for patrons. Marc noted that some employees who left the industry returned because they couldn't replicate the customer service experience they provided in the HCT sector in other industries. Those who returned also preferred the feedback they received from customers in real-time which is unique to the HCT industry. Lastly, Marc emphasized the value and ability of the industry to enhance the life of community members through positive human connection.

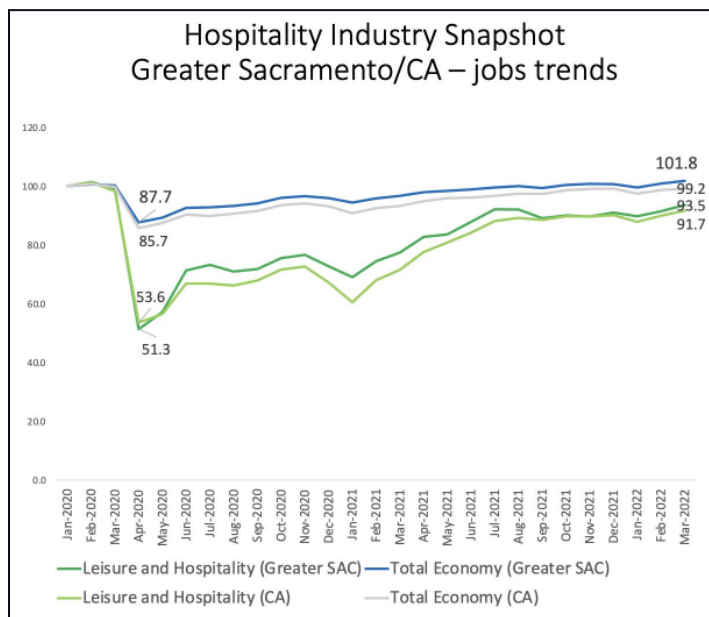
### Labor Market and Information Job Posting Insights

Aaron Wilcher, Research Director from the North Far North Center of Excellence provided labor market data on the HCT sector, as well as job posting information on the industry. Center of Excellence provides labor market information and technical support to determine the job market and opportunities for students in different sectors to inform program investments in Career Technical Education (CTE).

Research showed a reduction of about 10,000 jobs in the hospitality industry in the Greater Sacramento region due to the pandemic. Though job losses in the hospitality industry were roughly the same across the state, the Greater Sacramento region which consists of seven counties showed better job recovery compared to the rest of the state. Figure 1 shows monthly job trends in the Sacramento Region compared to the rest of the state. Overall, the Sacramento

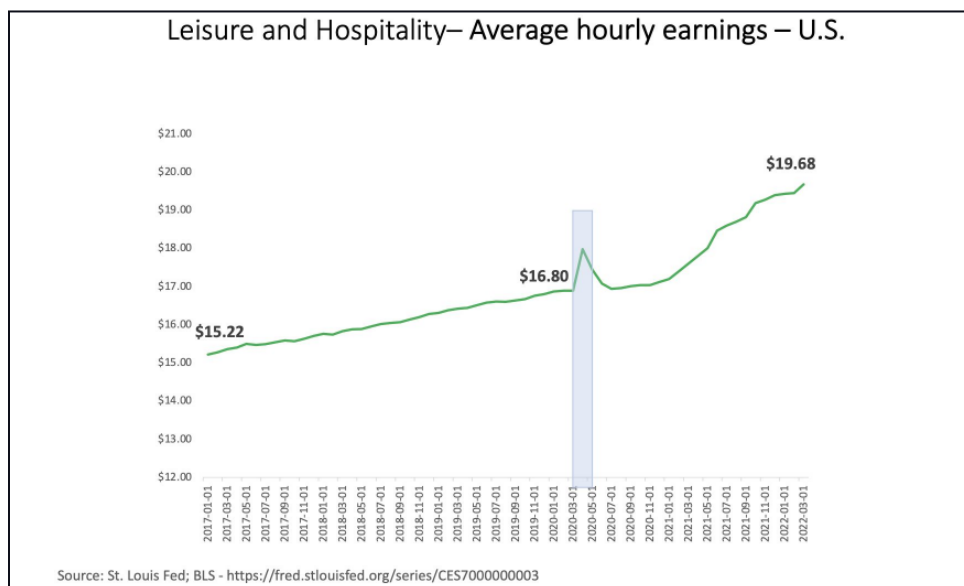
region fared better than the rest of the state by about 2 points. There were 8% fewer job postings in March of 2022 compared to January 2020, which indicates a remarkable economic recovery.

*Figure 1: Hospitality Industry Job Trends in the Sacramento Region*



Average annual earnings for food service workers in the Sacramento region are at par with the rest of the state. Overall, wages in the leisure and hospitality sectors have gone up across the board. Figure 2 shows a national wage increase of \$2.88 per hour for the leisure and hospitality industry in about two years. Employers are offering wage increases to attract workers back into the industry.

*Figure 2: National Average Earnings in the Hospitality Industry*



Wilcher stated that positions categorized as below middle-skill require at least a high school diploma and can offer key entry points for training workers interested in beginning a career in the Hospitality, Culinary, and Tourism industry and present opportunities for upskilling current employees. Figure 3 shows the most requested skills included in job postings in this sector. Job data from the Sacramento region in the last six months shows that compared to 2020, there are currently one and a half to two times more postings in the industry which indicates hiring challenges. Wilcher concluded that despite the high number of job postings, current research shows that the Hospitality, Culinary, and Tourism sector has regained 40% of the jobs lost in 2020.

*Figure 3: Top Requested Skills in Hospitality, Culinary Tourism Sector*

<b>Hospitality-tourism Jobs Postings – TOP SKILLS</b> <b>Greater Sacramento – Oct 1, 2021 – Mar 31, 2022</b>	
<b>Skill</b>	<b>Skill Postings</b>
Cleaning	3,670
Customer Service	3,421
Scheduling	3,330
Guest Services	2,889
Cooking	1,927
Food Preparation	1,787
Cash Handling	1,587
Sales	1,235
Restaurant Experience	1,181
Customer Checkout	1,155
Staff Management	1,110
Repair	1,096
Budgeting	1,093
Food Safety	891
Retail Industry Knowledge	870
Lifting Ability	841
Restaurant Management	734
Customer Contact	728
Safety Training	723

Source: Burning Glass, Labor Insight, Hospitality and tourism=NAICS 71-72

## Panel Discussion

- **Andrew Moret**, Director of Culinary, Oakmont Management Group
- **Brittany Claypool**, Brand Strategist, Oak Park Brewing Company
- **Jonathan Modrow**, Owner, Bottle & Barlow
- **Marc Sapoznik**, President and CEO, Rancho Cordova Travel & Tourism
- **Shelly Moranville**, General Manager, Residence Inn, Marriott



## Panel Overview

### **Oakmont Management Group**

Oakmont Management Group is a senior housing provider with 50 communities throughout California and seven communities in the Greater Sacramento Region, with a few communities currently under development. Andrew Moret is the Director of the Culinary Department at Oakmont. The department has a full-service restaurant and bar and has positions for cooks, servers, chefs, and hosts. Other positions in the organization include care providers and housekeepers.

### **Oak Park Brewing Company**

Oak Park Brewery and restaurant is a small craft brewery located in Oak Park in Sacramento. They are about bringing the community together to eat, drink and make a difference. They regularly host beer releases and benefit concerts to recognize local artists and raise funds for local nonprofits. Brittany Claypool is a brand strategist at the brewery and stated that the main positions they hire for include front line staff and line cooks.

### **Rancho Cordova Travel and Tourism**

Rancho Cordova Travel and Tourism is a Destination Management Organization. The organization's role is to attract visitors and tourists to Rancho Cordova to benefit the community economically and culturally. They have marketing positions at all management levels from directors to coordinators. Additionally, they hire sales staff whose role is to draw events to hotels in Rancho Cordova. Other positions include social media staff and traditional positions

including maintenance workers, housekeepers, and accountants. Marc Sapoznik, the Chief Executive Officer, shared that they created a workforce page for all hotel positions in the region during the pandemic due to the workforce shortage.

### **Residence Inn, Marriott**

Residence Inn Marriott is a full-service experience hotel located in the heart of downtown Sacramento, one block from the state Capitol and the Convention Center. The fifteen story hotel includes 235 spacious suites and amenities. Shelly Moranville is the General Manager at this location and stated all differing skill sets are needed to fill their available positions. They hire candidates for various roles including accountants, maintenance workers, assistant general managers, sales, bartenders, dining, and housekeepers.

### **Market Impact on Service Delivery and Hiring Practices**

The COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected business operations throughout the sector, requiring them to adjust their service delivery models to stay afloat. Many businesses utilized an approach to develop and maintain relationships with communities around them. Some businesses established a more active presence on social media platforms to attract a steady clientele. Hotels, such as the Marriott Inn in downtown Sacramento, created new positions whose primary responsibility was to establish rapport and build relationships with hotel guests. Oak Park Brewery adopted new marketing strategies to attract customers during the lockdown. This included converting part of their business into a community space for community members to host events, creating their own community events, and a vibrant social media campaign. Additionally they leaned into the burgeoning take out market by canning beers for purchase.

Staffing shortages presented a significant challenge for all the businesses represented on the panel. Andrew Moret, Culinary director at Oakmont Management Group Management group stated that staffing shortages in the culinary department at the height of the pandemic compelled them to adopt new strategies to fill open positions. They targeted culinary schools and network associations to advertise hiring opportunities. Additionally, turnover from local restaurants added to the limited applicant pool. Another practice widely adopted to address staffing shortages involved allowing for increased flexibility for employees in scheduling shifts, providing more accommodation to their personal and individual needs.

### **Career Advancement Pathways and Opportunities for Entry-Level Staff**

The panelists agreed that there was value in promoting current employees to senior positions within the company instead of relying on external recruitment of upper management staff. Promotions from within became a common practice during the pandemic due to high turnover at the management level due to burnout brought about by the pandemic.

Some businesses created training programs to help entry-level staff develop interpersonal and hard skills directly related to the more senior positions they were interested in pursuing. Additionally, the panel stated they spend time getting to know their employees to understand their long-term goals so that individuals can determine if they aspire to continue to grow in the Hotel, Culinary, and Tourism industry. There was consensus that promoting workers from within and understanding their long-term goals would increase employee retention and help employees reach their full potential.

### **Desired Soft Skills**

The panelists pointed out that hospitality, culinary, and tourism careers are mostly public-facing. As such, employees need to have the cultural awareness to interact with people from diverse backgrounds and have excellent communication skills to carry on a conversation with customers. Additionally, employers look for relatable candidates who can empathize with customers and fellow staff members. Collaboration skills are also highly desired. Employees with these skills can anticipate and adapt to the organization's changing needs.

## **Conclusion**

Josh Sweigert, Assistant Director of Employer Partnerships discussed his role which is to connect community colleges to employers in the Hospitality, Culinary, and Tourism sector.

Caitlin Blockus, Project Manager at Valley Vision, talked about Handshake, a career development platform for college students to access employment opportunities, internship opportunities, and employer events. The attendees were given contact information of the Assistant Regional Director of Employer Partnership, Josh Sweigert, Michael Frigm, Professor of Culinary Arts Management at Cosumnes River College and Renee John, Director of Workforce Development at Valley Vision. The contact information is listed below:

- Josh Sweigert, Assistant Director of Employer Partnerships: Retail, Hospitality, and Tourism /Ag. WET - [sweigert@ltcc.edu](mailto:sweigert@ltcc.edu)
- Michael Frigm, Professor of Culinary Arts Management at Cosumnes River College - [FrigmM@crc.losrios.edu](mailto:FrigmM@crc.losrios.edu)
- Renee John, Director of Workforce Development, Valley Vision - [renee.john@valleyvision.org](mailto:renee.john@valleyvision.org)