

The New York Times |

ARCHIVES | 1998

The Best Summer Jobs on Long Island

By DAVID WINZELBERG JULY 5, 1998

Summer jobs are hot. Economists say that the combination of a strong economy and a shortage of labor has created the best employment market on Long Island in more than 30 years.

The "Now Hiring" signs in store windows around the Island only tell part of the story. Companies are competing for the next crop of graduates by aggressively pursuing students, hiring them for the summer in hopes of luring them for full-time employment later on.

"The job climate has never been better for those graduating and for those seeking summer jobs," said Dr. Pearl Kamer, chief economist for the Long Island Association, who added that 21,000 new jobs were created on the Island in the 12 months ending in May. Ms. Kamer said there is a shortage of skilled labor here, which can be attributed to an aging population and fewer students entering the work force. "Anyone who wants a summer job can find one."

But who wants just any job? While summer jobs can bring images of lifeguards and cabana boys, students are finding there are more opportunities to find work that can enhance a resume and even pays well. And, of course, there are still the jobs that are more fun than lucrative. So while someone can spend the summer deep in cancer research, another can work at a water park with performing sea lions and tropical birds

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Skydive Long Island

Sharon Novotny is the first person people talk to after they decide to jump out of an airplane. Her degree in sociology from Stony Brook sometimes helps to set first-time jumpers' minds at ease.

"I try to keep a cheery attitude," said Ms. Novotny, 24, who works for Skydive Long Island in East Moriches on weekends for \$8 an hour. "I give them some details about the jump and they start to feel more comfortable."

Ms. Novotny signs up the customers, explains the jump process and edits videos the company takes of people exiting the Cessna 182. Although Ms. Novotny had no jump experience when she began the job three years ago, that changed two weeks later when she made a dive 10,000 feet above Spadaro Airport. Now 131 jumps later, she is looking towards her jumpmaster certification, the first step toward becoming an instructor.

"You're dealing with all kinds of different people in an exciting environment," she said. "There's so much energy. It's a major adrenaline rush."

Island Rock Gym

Steven Schwartz, 18, of Plainview is an avid rock climber and will spend this summer like he has many others: hanging from ropes suspended from a wall. But unlike the other summers, this time he is getting paid for it.

As a rock climbing instructor at Island Rock Gym in Plainview, Mr. Schwartz, a freshman at the University of Pennsylvania, helps novice climbers solve the maze of multicolored holes on the 30-foot-high gray walls in this converted warehouse. Much of the time, he acts as anchor at children's parties, holding the ropes attached to a device that keeps youngsters from taking a dangerous tumble. His pay during parties is \$12.50 an hour plus tips, and for assisting individual customers he is awarded time on the wall and credit toward climbing gear, which he plans to use at the end of the summer when he goes climbing in the Shawangunk Mountains near New Paltz.

"It's a lot more fun than a desk job," he said. "It's extremely athletic and there's a lot of thinking involved. I get some exercise and I get to do what I like."

Farrell Fritz

Pierre McDonnaugh's first summer job while he was in high school was in the produce aisle at a Waldbaum's supermarket. Now in his second year at the Howard

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Mr. McDonnaugh now earns more than \$1,000 a week as a summer associate at Farrell Fritz, one of the Island's largest law firms, just minutes from his Uniondale home.

At 33, and the father of twin 13-year-old boys, Mr. McDonnaugh is not the typical summer employee. But after four years in the Air Force and a couple more as a stockbroker, he decided to change careers. Chosen to fill one of the five summer positions, Mr. McDonnaugh didn't have much time to get comfortable.

"The first closing they sent me on was an \$11 million commercial property transaction," he said. "That was fun." And since the firm said it actively recruited him with an eye toward a permanent position, Mr. McDonnaugh said he expects to return after he graduates. "Things are looking pretty positive," he said.

Cold Spring Harbor Lab

Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory is one of the world's leading genetics research centers, but it is also a pretty cool place for a summer job. And for 23 students from all over the world, the lab's 10-week Undergraduate Research Program is an opportunity to live and work alongside some of the leaders in genetic research. David Baltimore, a graduate of the lab's first summer program in 1959, went on to win a Nobel Prize. The program provides room and board and pays each student \$2,000.

Rachel Dodes, 21, of Roslyn, is senior majoring in biology at Cornell University and is participating in cancer research at the lab by experimenting on gene function. Perched serenely above Cold Spring Harbor, the lab campus belies the pace of the work. So far, she has found the atmosphere intense.

"I just gave a speech about something I didn't know anything about five days ago," said Ms. Dodes, whose efforts are aimed at battling cancer. "It's cutting-edge research and people work very, very hard, but that's science. And I feel like I'm doing something very important."

Computer Associates

For the last three summers, Ryan Ahlers worked at Computer Associates, the software company in Islandia. First working in technical support, he spent the last two summers finding bugs in software. This summer, having just graduated from Seton Hall University with a degree in business management information systems, he has turned those summer jobs into full-time employment.

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60 spots in the company's Boot Camp program, where recent graduates like Ryan Ahlers are prepared for full-time jobs. The 22-year-old from St. James will earn an annual salary of more than \$40,000.

For Mr. Ahlers, all those summers provided invaluable experience.

"The other summer jobs I've had didn't lead anywhere, and there was no relevant future," he said. "By working at an internship in the field you want to pursue, you have a foot in the door. It's a big advantage."

Splish Splash

Splish Splash, the eight-year-old water park in Riverhead, is Long Island's largest private summer employer, hiring about 700 young people every summer.

Jennifer Elflein, 21, of Shirley, has worked at the park for six summers. She started out selling ice cream and gifts, but in the past few years, Ms. Elflein, a junior at the New York Institute of Technology in Central Islip, has taken to show business.

While the park's three sea lions catch hoops and bounce balls in the blue cement pool, Ms. Elflein choreographs the show with music. After the sea lions take their bows, she hustles across the park to work the tropical bird show, where macaws and a cockatoo ride bicycles and Rollerblade. Last year, Ms. Elflein accompanied Weldon Middlebrook, a trainer, and his birds for an appearance on an MTV variety show, which was her highlight for the summer.

"That was probably the best part," said Ms. Elflein, who earns slightly more than the \$6 an hour average park wage. "I don't do it for the money. I've made a lot of friends here and I love the animals."

Acclaim Entertainment

A summer job playing Nintendo? Not exactly, but this is probably close. Charles Bae took a summer intern position with Acclaim Entertainment, a video game manufacturer in Glen Cove last year.

Hired for its marketing department, the company recognized Mr. Bae's talents and moved him to creative services, where he contributed artwork to a new game package. Mr. Bae, of Glen Cove, spent his Christmas break redesigning the company's Web site. This summer, as one of eight interns earning \$6.50 to \$10 an hour, he is illustrating instruction manuals and packaging for the company's newest products.

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They're giving me responsibility and real life experience as a graphic designer."

The Ocean Club

For many, summer at the beach is one big party. Especially in the Hamptons. Get some sun, dance on the sand, play a little volleyball, mix a few frozen daiquiris. When it's your job, that's even better.

Tracey Koke, a junior at the University of South Carolina, has a summer job at the Ocean Club in East Quogue, where on a busy day, a thousand people will spill out and onto the beach. Her job is to serve drinks and play on the beach with the customers.

"It's so much fun," Mr. Koke, 20, of Southold, said. "We play volleyball and basketball, we dance and do skits. We don't just serve drinks."

Ms. Koke makes an average \$1,000 a week, mostly from tips. "It is hard work," she said. "You're on your feet all day. But you get used to it when you realize how much money you're taking home."

New York Jets Fest

While the players strain through training camp at the team's complex in Uniondale, Rob Levites will be playing games just a few yards away.

Introduced by the team's marketing department last year, Jets Fest is an interactive attraction for children featuring carnival-like games related to football. It opens July 21 and when training camp ends in August, Jets Fest will move to Giants Stadium.

Thirty interns from area colleges run the show, which includes an obstacle course, a display of autographed footballs and the 1969 Super Bowl trophy. The \$1,000 two-month wage is also supplemented with Jets T-shirts, jackets and hats.

Mr. Levites, 22, of Great Neck, plays linebacker for Hofstra University, where, as a junior, he majors in marketing. He said his summer job is a great way to learn about sponsors, promotions and the business side of the game.

"It's an in to a professional football organization," he said. "It's a major pro team in a major market, which is pretty impressive on your resume."

Jones Beach Concerts

Always a hot ticket, thousands line up to see the music acts at the Jones Beach Concert Series every summer. And while there are few bad seats, Thomas Calandrillo

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As technical director for the videotaping of the concerts, Mr. Calandrillo, 21, from Greenlawn, sits backstage in front of an electronic board, controlling the camera feeds. And although he works with many musicians, like Green Day, Aerosmith and Van Halen, his job can get pretty intense.

"Once you go backstage it's like another world," he said. "It's just hectic. When the director says 'Cut to one,' you better be ready to cut to one."

Mr. Calandrillo, a junior and video arts major at Five Towns College in Dix Hills, will do 30 shows this summer and makes \$100 a show. He said the experience is invaluable. "This is exactly what I want to focus on," he said. "It's an opportunity of a lifetime."

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A version of this article appears in print on July 5, 1998, on Page L114 of the National edition with the headline: The Best Summer Jobs on Long Island.

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