

# Looking at the causes and the possible solutions

By Leonard Woolsey | Posted: Saturday, March 12, 2016 10:45 pm

You've got to admit, it is odd when local businesses are struggling to find applicants to hire for open positions.

But as strange — and as different from the national narrative — as this sounds, this seems to be the case for many island businesses. According to a piece in The Daily News on Thursday, one such business had to remain closed on a Sunday because it couldn't hire people to fill those shifts.

Other business owners also reported having an extremely hard time hiring people to work at island restaurants.

“You're not having as many people looking for jobs as there are jobs being created,” said Johnny Smecca, principal of Galveston Restaurant Group, which operates seven island restaurants.

“You won't find a restaurant with a full wait staff this summer at any point in time.”

The labor shortage is a problem everyone, including city leaders, should be trying to solve.

Smecca also is a member of a Galveston Economic Development Partnership task force created a few years ago to address the issue.

“We've had serious conversations,” Smecca said. “We're trying to come up with solutions.”

Task force members are looking at the reasons for the shortage of workers in food service and hospitality industries, Smecca said.

They're (GEDP) asking such questions as whether there's enough affordable housing on the island that fits the needs of workers. And they're reaching out to schools and universities on the island.

But interestingly, shortly after The Daily News story published, our switchboard lit up with people wanting to discuss it. That is a good thing.

This subject rightly deserves further and more advanced inspection. What is it that is creating a situation where there are businesses struggling to hire workers and stay open in the face of an economic reality that might say otherwise?

The Daily News is going to begin looking more closely at this important subject — asking questions, developing conclusions and sharing opinions. Wages, cost of living, affordable housing, transportation and even the availability of a willing and qualified workforce all play into potential solutions. What we'll find is yet to be determined, but we know the answer will play a valuable role in the continuation of growth and quality of life in our communities.

- Leonard Woolsey