

SEASONAL EMPLOYMENT IN OHIO HURTS WINTER MONTHS



As Lake Erie freezes each winter, workers at the Miller Boat Line on Catawba Island are laid off, with the promise of being re-hired once the frozen lake thaws in March. One of those employees, Val Kochensparger, is laid off each year just before Christmas, which forces her to collect unemployment for roughly eight to ten weeks. When employed, Kochensparger is a ticket window operator for the boat company. She has worked for the company for 20 years, mainly because the company treats her co-workers and her very well. "I can't imagine having to do it with just one income," she said. "It would be tough. We had our tough winters when I first started. When I first started, we were shut down by Thanksgiving and opened back up in May. Now the seasons are longer." One of the best examples of seasonal employment can be found at Put-in-Bay. Only a handful of businesses stay open during the frigid winter months, mainly to provide goods and services for South Bass Island residents. The mainland of the area does somewhat better during the winter months with its attractions but some of them do close. "Certainly, these businesses are making the majority of their revenue for the year in a relatively short period of time," Larry Fletcher, Ottawa County Visitors Bureau executive director, said. "They need to maximize the amount they make, and it needs to last." A hotel in the area, The Sleep Inn, usually closes from late fall until April. Sometimes it stays open later if contractors come to town to work on the Davis-Besse Nuclear Power Station in Carroll Township. The hotel will house all of the contractors, helping it break even. Employers in this area explain to their employees that they probably will not be employed during the off-season but they are welcome to the challenge. Tourism is extremely vital for the area but manufacturing is still the number one employing industry according to county officials. In Ottawa County in 2009, there were 2,966 full-time equivalent jobs in the travel and tourism industry. These statistics were provided by the Ohio Division of Travel and Tourism. The majority of those jobs are part-time year-round or full-time seasonal jobs. Steve Arndt, the Ottawa County Commissioner, said that plenty of seasonal workers do well enough to make a career out of working for only part of the year. Arndt said that those workers spent 40 or more hours at work during the summer, collect unemployment during the winter, and get to spend more time with their families while not on the job. In the state of Ohio, Ottawa County has the 17th highest median income, according to the Ohio Department of Development. The median household income in Ottawa County is \$53,277, which is compared to the median household income for the state of Ohio, at \$47,669.

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