

LOCAL

LOOKING FOR A CAREER?

Check out the hospitality industry

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You're about to graduate from high school and are thinking about college and a career. Maybe you've decided, for whatever reason, that a previously-chosen vocation is not exactly right for you.

People in this or similar situations will inevitably hear about opportunities in the computer-driven, high-tech industry. They will hear that across the United States, nurses and teachers are in short supply and that as a consequence, salaries for these professions are increasing.

These are just a few of the possibilities in the currently booming U.S. economy.

However, if you live in Florida and are black, there's another career possibility you might consider. It's the hospitality industry.

"It's a very lucrative industry," said Sandra Daley-Gonzalez, tourism sales manager for Latin America and Spain at the Greater Miami Convention and Visitors Bureau.

"It's the biggest employer in Miami," she added. "The salary is competitive. It's a growing industry. With new hotels being built there will be more jobs. You will meet nice people. You get to travel. You learn a lot. It's a very learning kind of career."

Also, she said, there is an organization, the Visitor Industry Council, which will help fund your training and help again with job placement.

OPPORTUNITIES

Daley-Gonzalez, who is a member of the Visitor Industry Council's board of directors, is herself an example of the opportunities the industry offers and how the council can help black people access those opportunities.

An immigrant from Montego Bay, Jamaica, she lived in Boston before moving to Miami "because it was tropical." She went to school and was working in tourism when Hurricane Andrew hit South Florida in 1992.

After the storm "tourism was going down, because people thought Miami was dead, flattened by the hurricane," she said. "While some rebuilding was taking place in Miami Beach, the South Dade area was suffering badly."

The Greater Miami Convention and Visitors Bureau secured a grant to

help the hotels and other properties in the South Dade tourist industry, and along with the Economic Development Association, began an effort to help the industry "come up to par."

Daley-Gonzalez got a job in a program to publicize both the rebuilding effort and the availability of services.



Sandra Daley-Gonzalez

SUCCESS

The program worked well. She got to know the venues. She got to know the people in the industry. So when the convention and visitors bureau needed a coordinator for its convention services division, she was hired.

Daley-Gonzalez had already earned an associate degree in travel tourism management from Miami-Dade Community College. The time had come to upgrade.

Enter the Visitor Industry Council.

She got a scholarship from the council to attend Florida International University, graduating with a bachelor's in hospitality management. The convention and visitors bureau promoted her to convention services manager. She also learned Spanish, "which has helped immensely" in the current position.

Daley-Gonzalez thinks her path is a relatively easy one to follow, especially given the assistance available from Visitor Industry Council.

AFTER BOYCOTT

The agency was established by the Greater Miami Convention and Visitors Bureau in 1991 in response to a boycott of Miami's tourism industry by a coalition of civil rights organizations, which charged that African Americans and other minorities were being excluded from management positions in the industry.

The boycott had resulted

in a major loss of convention-type business, as several large companies took their meetings elsewhere.

The Visitor Industry Council funds full two-year scholarships for African Americans (including Caribbean immigrants and other blacks) to the Hospitality Management Program at FIU.

The Visitor Industry Council operates a career-development and job-placement program that includes workshops on interviewing and goal setting, and it publishes a monthly job bulletin.

Despite awarding more than 120 scholarships since it was formed, the council is less than satisfied with the interest shown in the program. And Daley-Gonzalez is particularly dissatisfied with the number of Caribbean-American blacks seeking to use the assistance available.

WRONG VIEW

"There aren't more black people in this industry because when they think hospitality, they think of the lower-end jobs in hotels and restaurants," she told Caribbean Today. She remembers fellow students at FIU responding indignantly when she asked why they didn't consider the hospitality industry as a career.

"I don't want to bus tables. I don't want to carry luggage. I don't want to sell airline tickets," they would tell her.

"Hospitality doesn't only comprise of restaurants and hotels," she said. "It's comprised of organizations like [the convention and visitors bureau]. It involves working with planning, transportation and catering companies. It involves working with museums and other attractions."

She notes also that people can start their own businesses within the industry.

"There are plenty of minorities within the industry but not enough blacks," she says, "and many of those who are there, are holding the low-end jobs."

"[The Visitor Industry Council] is trying to bring in black people above that level, to get them trained for management positions," she said.

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