

FOCUS ON

RE

Now's the time to start looking for holiday jobs

The holiday shopping season is here, and with it come new opportunities for retail employment. Whether you just need a little extra money for presents, or, like Rachel on "Friends," the chance to work at a fancy department store is "like the mothership calling you home," this is the time to check into a seasonal retail job.

"We are hiring for positions now. We will continue to hire," says Tom Morrisroe, regional manager of human resources for Marshall Field's. "Our ideal is that we would be fully hired the week before Thanksgiving, but even thereafter, we do continue to hire based on our needs; if business is up or we have more areas to fill."

Stores are also hiring at the area's biggest retail location, Woodfield Mall. General Manager Marc Strich says that while Woodfield itself has filled its holiday staffing needs, all the stores are still hiring. "They advertise through our Web site, www.shopwoodfield.com. It has currently got over 100 jobs listed from 90 different merchants, and is updated on a weekly basis. We also have these openings listed at our information booth, and many retailers also post signage in their stores."

Both Strich and Morrisroe say the number of seasonal retail jobs available seems to be equal to last year.

While stores usually want employees who can work the entire season, some opportunities are available for students. "We may have some college students who only come back for a week or two around Christmas time," says Morrisroe. "They may have worked for us during the summer and did a great job, and we want them back at Christmas. These are team members who understand what we're looking for from them, so to orient them back into the organization involves minimal training for us."

Training at Field's can take eight to 12 hours, and involve immersion in the long-time retailer's culture. "As we orient people into the organization, we want to make sure that they have knowledge, not only of who we are today, but where our history is, what our tradition has been," says Morrisroe. "When we hire team members in all of our locations, we take them on a tour of the buildings, just ensuring that they know where things are." Not only should employees know their department, he adds, but they'll need to help customers find items in other departments and give them directions.

There may be no shortage of applications for seasonal retail positions, but most upscale retailers will be looking more closely at their qualifications. William Hearst, vice president of Human Resources for Bloomingdale's, says

they look especially for "upbeat attitude and a demonstrated eagerness to assist the customers." Trainees at Bloomingdale's, Hearst says, spend a lot of time learning about the store's history and also about their brand strategy. "They'll get an understanding of how to treat our customers as very special guests," says Hearst.

Retailers hire for expanded holiday hours, as late as 11 p.m. at Woodfield's stores. Some departments like furniture or menswear, which aren't normally busy with gift shoppers, may simply have current employees flex their shifts to cover the hours. Field's Christmas Shops and other holiday themed retailers have been bringing in new clerks since Labor Day. "People seem to want to put their home decorations up earlier and earlier," notes Strich. "One of our stores had some unique ornaments imported from Ireland, and they already sold out in the first few weeks of September."

As with Christmas shopping, anyone thinking about a holiday retail job should start early. Morrisroe says, "Don't wait, because we schedule our training classes so our team members are starting by Thanksgiving. The individual walking in the first week in December may be disappointed."

If retail is to your liking, you could find a way to stay on permanently. "The unusual thing this year is that many of our seasonal people from last year ended up staying with us on a permanent basis," says Strich. "There were many telecom jobs lost in our area, and what had been a second job has become a primary source of income for many families."

Morrisroe notes, "It's amazing, but you can sit at an anniversary breakfast, whether it's for team members celebrating five, 10, or 50 years, and they'll say 'I started working for Marshall Field's at Christmas.' We look forward to discovering those individuals who have performed well and want to stay with us, and we look for every opportunity we can to make that happen."

"If people are looking for ongoing careers, then they should let their managers know as soon as possible that they'd love to stay on and look for opportunities," he suggests. "Unless you let somebody know, you may be overlooked or forgotten. Raise the flag and say you'd love to consider staying on, because a lot of seasonal people come and they go, but we need to have great people working for us all year 'round."

— Mark McDermott

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