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Baseball brings jobs, hope in dim economy

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Emily Loid was both excited and nervous as she stocked bags of chips behind her small concession stand. In fact, she was surprised to be working at all.

"It's my first job," the 16-year-old said. "I was just looking for a part-time job. I came to the job fair and checked on it."

Loid is one of about 250 people who have new jobs thanks to Bowling Green's minor league baseball team, and as the Bowling Green Hot Rods took to their home field for the first time this weekend, officials expected that to be a boon for the local economy.

The stadium is expected to draw thousands of baseball fans, boost local businesses, create new jobs and make Bowling Green more attractive to potential employers, officials said.

"We've already seen an increase in our construction jobs from the building of the ballpark," Bowling Green Mayor Elaine Walker said. "What we're hoping to see is more people from our region coming to Bowling Green ... there's a good possibility they will also stop off at a store or restaurant or another place of business while in town."

Linda Thompson, general manager of Best Western on Cumberland Trace Road, said she expects room reservations to increase as people venture to Bowling Green to catch a game.

"I think if they're looking for something in Bowling Green fun to do, I think this is something new they will enjoy," she said.

Travis Mills, manager of Brickyard Cafe on Chestnut Street, said he anticipates a customer increase as people come downtown for the ballgames.

"The more there is to do downtown, the more likely (people) will stay down here," he said. "I think some people don't even realize these restaurants exist down here."

Dino Zarajic, manager of Taste of Europe on State Street, said his restaurant is somewhat obscure – but hopes the ballpark will draw more attention to the tiny eatery. Taste of Europe workers will be handing out business cards and menus at the ballgames.

"The more people that are in this area in general will come by and notice us," he said, "because we are small, kind of a doorway on a building."

Professional baseball also will enhance the city's image, said Jim **Hizer**, president and CEO of the Bowling Green Area Chamber of Commerce.

"The fact that we have such a nice stadium and the fact that we have professional baseball clearly sets us apart from communities of our size that don't have those amenities," he said.

The new ball team will also better the community's quality of life – which includes an area's health care

facilities, climate, educational opportunities and activities. The ballpark will give people more things to do, adding to their quality of life, **Hizer** said.

“The better our quality of life, the better our economic opportunities,” he said, “because we’re going to be able to attract talented, educated people to live in our area.”

For now, the ballpark has helped many local residents get seasonal work. Hot Rods officials have hired people to work in the merchandise store, provide food service, sell tickets and keep the park clean.

Still, as the recession continues to claim jobs, ballpark officials could not hire everyone who sought work – about 750 people submitted applications, but only 250 were hired.

“I think a lot of people are appreciative of an opportunity to work,” said Brad Taylor, general manager of the Hot Rods. “You’re going to see a lot of smiling faces who are really glad to be here.”

Denise Cole was getting ready Friday to start her new job in the merchandising store – “I just filled out an application for a part-time job to pay the extra bills,” she said.

Sixteen-year-old Jennifer Morgan was looking for summer work, but she wasn’t expecting to land a job that so many people wanted. So she was shocked when she learned she would be running a concession stand – Morgan was setting up the Dippin’ Dots ice cream stand Friday.

“I had so many friends say, ‘I went to the Hot Rods (for a job),’ ” she said. “I was like, ‘Wow, I’m never going to get a job here.’ I was just surprised.”

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