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» sunday | April 19, 2009

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Demand for day spa workers **grows** despite recession

With high unemployment rates and a widespread recession, one might think jobs in a "luxury" industry would be in short supply. Yet many day spas have actually seen an increase in demand, and need qualified massage therapists, yoga instructors and other professionals to keep pace with business.

Penny-pinching Americans may not be

willing to spend extra on some luxuries or comfort items, but a trip to the day spa can be seen as making

COVER STORY

sense for both economic and health reasons, points out Debbie Bates, a massage therapy and spa

instructor at Everest College in Fife, Wash. People who once took long vacations and bought big-ticket luxury items are cutting back, but still want to feel like they are treating themselves.

"We find that many people have started indulging in affordable luxuries like massages and

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yoga," Bates says. "Day spas aren't competing with the local beauty parlor. A trip to the spa is seen as a luxury good, like a two-week vacation or diamond bracelet. But compared to a cruise or expensive jewelry, a 90-minute massage is a real bargain."

There are more than 14,500 spas in the U.S., with about 80 percent of those being day spas, according to the International Spa Association's 2007 estimates. With many day spas experiencing increased demand, qualified salon and spa professionals are needed.

Demand for massage therapists is expected to grow by 20 percent through 2016, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. *Money* magazine lists massage therapy among its top 20 careers. Demand for spa professionals has been growing for a while.

The industry has boomed since 1999, and 53 percent of salon owners

had job openings in 2006, hiring nearly half a million new employees, according to a 2007 report commissioned by the National Accrediting Commission of Cosmetology Arts and Sciences. Despite industry changes, the future of the salon and spa industry is strong, and demand for experienced employees still exceeds supply at many day spas, the commission found.

Another factor driving increased demand at spas is the public perception of spas' emphasis on overall wellness, Bates says. "Spas are not simply places for 'pampering.' Rather, they promote health and wellness. They really focus on helping clients relax and manage their stress."

Americans' stress levels have been rising for years. In fact, a 2004 APA survey found that 73 percent of Americans cited money concerns as the top factor affecting their stress level. "When times are tough, finding the right way to relax might be the best thing you can do for your health," Bates says.

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