



broughtonHOTELS Vice President of People Services Teri Serrano interviews Gerry Johnson for a job at the historic Brookdale Lodge. (Shmuel Thaler -- Santa Cruz Sentinel)

By Jondi Gumz, Santa Cruz Sentinel

BROOKDALE >> Gayle Silverman, bartender at Henfling’s for 13 years, has been at loose ends since the tavern closed March 31.

Ty Cunningham, a junior at San Lorenzo Valley High School, has two jobs but would like to work closer to home.

Gerry Johnson, a retired management consultant, has a vision to attract musicians to San Lorenzo Valley.

They all showed up Wednesday at a hiring fair seeking one of the 18 positions open at the Brookdale Lodge, a historic venue that dates to 1852 and attracted gangsters and Hollywood actors before being neglected and then six years ago shuttered.

The lodge, at 11570 Highway 9, was famous for its Brook Room restaurant — diners seated at tables above a river flowing through a landscape of stones and ferns. The restaurant and the swimming pool are not part of the first phase but they are on the to-do list.

“This is my legacy,” said Pravin Patel, 56, of Santa

Cruz, a hotelier who bought the Brookdale Lodge property in 2015 and expects to spend \$7 million to \$9 million to reopen the retreat in the redwoods.

He hopes to open the weekend after Memorial Day.

He’s renovated 46 rooms with new bathrooms, new bedding and big-screen televisions.

He’s given the lobby a fresh look with a new floor and a stone fireplace.

He’s outfitted the bar with plush chairs in turquoise and burgundy where job-seekers interviewed.

“This is the day I’ve been waiting for,” he said Wednesday. “I feel some of the stress melting away.”

The imposing redwoods that bring visitors to San Lorenzo Valley also make it difficult to build, so a new hotel is a rarity. The job fair represents opportunity for nearby Boulder Creek, where unemployment is 7.6 percent, higher than the 5.4 percent countywide rate.

Silverman, 56, of Felton, said she would love to come to work at Brookdale Lodge and make the bar a welcoming spot.

“She does have a following,” Lisa Rogers, 55, of Boulder Creek, said of Silverman.

Rogers came to apply for a customer service position. She said she took care of her grandchildren until her daughter recently moved to La Jolla.

“Now I’m going crazy,” she said.

Ty, 17, was among the youngest job applicants. He is interested in customer service, cleaning, security or the cafe when it’s ready.

He has been working part time in Scotts Valley and Santa Cruz but the possibility of walking to work appealed to him along with the historic aspect.

“If I were among the first staff to be hired, that would be really cool,” he said.

Johnson, 62, lives only a mile away. He heard about the project from architect John McKelvey, hired by Patel to design the revamp of the lodge.

“Everybody wants to see it come back,” Johnson said. “When he put James Dean back up, he made a lot of people happy.”

A huge mural of the young actor, reputed to have visited Brookdale Lodge before he died at 24, graces an exterior wall, the creation of artist John Cerney.

Patel hired broughtonHOTELSHOTELS, which focuses on boutique properties, to manage the Brookdale Lodge.

“I started out of high school and worked my way up,” said Justin Conner, 25, transitions manager, who came from Anaheim. “I really like it up here.”

Teri Serrano, broughtonHOTELS’s vice president of people services, interviewed job-hunters in the lobby.

“I’ve met some really great people,” she said.

broughtonHOTELS manages 10 hotels, including Hotel Solares in Santa Cruz, but “nothing like this,” Serrano said.

She’s been working with Patel on “the transformation,” as she put it, for the past year.

“I want to win the lotto and give the money to Pravin so he can finish it,” she said.



broughtonHOTELS Transition Manager Justin Conner, left, interviews a job seeker at Brookdale Lodge Wednesday morning. The lodge has 18 openings to fill. (Shmuel Thaler -- Santa Cruz Sentinel)

Patel not only owns the lodge, but also a cluster of 13 cabins on the other side of Highway 9, where renovations are also in progress.

Barbara Mason, the county’s economic development coordinator, gave job applicants a tour, sharing her research on the site’s history.

The oldest part of the property is a log cabin built in 1852, according to Mason. Weddings took place there but it’s not usable, she said, because the floor is not safe.

She expects construction to reopen the Brook Room and the swimming pool will take two or three years.

A new kitchen must be installed, and the Mermaid Room with underwater views must be engineered.

Patel already invested in a \$250,000 septic system, install a grease trap for \$200,000 to prevent kitchen fires and remove asbestos — improvements necessitated by new building codes.

“He’s made a huge commitment to make this project work,” Mason said.

Patel said county staff in planning, building and environmental health have been “very helpful.”

Over the years, there have been stories about ghosts at Brookdale Lodge, but Patel finds the spirits friendly.

“I think the lodge appreciates what we are doing,” he said.

Asked if he talks to the lodge, he said, “It talks to me first. And I say ‘We’ll take care of it.’”