

# International workers get crash course in mountain living

By Kathryn Reed

Outside the college theater conversations were taking place about where each other is living on the South Shore, what country they are from and what their job is.

Being an international worker is what they have in common. With that designation also comes the unfamiliarity of living in a mountain town, not knowing how to get around, where things are, or the nuances of the ski industry vocabulary.

On Friday night, 122 workers filled Lake Tahoe Community College's theater to get a dose of reality about what the South Shore is all about.



Mauricio Travassos and Txai Santiago, both from Brazil, are excited to be working in South Lake Tahoe.

Photo/Kathryn

Reed

Txai Santiago attended the free event put on by the Sierra Human Resources Association (SHRA) to better understand South Lake Tahoe and meet people. She is working in the rental shop at Sierra-at-Tahoe.

A fellow Brazilian, Mauricio Travassos, works at Sierra as a cashier in one of the restaurants. He said he came to Tahoe to live in the mountains and experience cold weather.

Friday's gathering attracted workers from Sierra, Kirkwood, Powder House and Heavenly Sports. Home for them is Chile, Brazil, Peru, Argentina, South Africa and Australia. Most are in their late teens or early 20s.

"Clearly they get a good orientation into their own resort's culture and the job, but they don't get to connect with kids from other countries," explained Laura Moriarty, president-elect of the nonprofit SHRA.

This is the second season the group has put on the orientations. Two North Shore events were in December. Between the three workshops, more than 400 workers were reached. Moriarty believes that's about 85 percent of the international workers.

Topics on Jan. 8 included:

Ski-town and Resort Terms 101

Living in and getting around the Lake Tahoe/Truckee Community

Ways to save money

Banking at Wells Fargo Bank

Common American Customs

Partying and Night Life

## Fit for Work and Health and Safety

### College Classes

But it went deeper – explaining what verbal and sexual harassment are, where free Internet access is, how to get around without a vehicle, what tipping is all about, rules about drinking alcohol, and what there is to do outside of work.

The college had a table explaining the classes and resources available during their short stay. Tahoe Regional Planning Agency had information as well and gave a short presentation about what it means to be a good steward of the land.

Fewer international workers are working at Lake Tahoe resorts compared to past years because more people living in the United States are applying for those same jobs.

Moriarty said there was a time when about 25 percent of resort's seasonal employees were from outside the United States. That percentage is down to 7.

"The main reason we hire international workers is it brings an international flavor to the resort," Kirstin Cattell, Sierra's spokeswoman said.

In California, almost 20 percent of the tourists are from outside the country. With skiers-boarders being from all over the world, having a diverse work force adds to the international experience.

The workers want a world experience, too.

"It's better than I thought it would be," Santiago said of working and living in the States.