



Photos by DOUGLAS R. CLIFFORD | Times

Visitors, many of them locals, have been returning to Clearwater Beach, breathing lifeblood back into Florida's tourist-dependent economy. Below a watercraft is launched from Clearwater Beach Waverunner Rentals based at the Clearwater Marina boardwalk on Clearwater Bay on Wednesday.

# LABOR'S PAIN

BY MALENA CAROLLO, EMILY L. MAHONEY, JAY CRIDLIN AND SARA DINATALE  
Times Staff Writers

**F**lorida's labor force today is spread across more different industries than it was in prior decades. But many of the Sunshine State's workers are still concentrated in the types of jobs that have been among the hardest hit during the pandemic.

And many of them are looking for employment or banking fewer hours this Labor Day.

"Florida has come a long way in the last 20 years from a diversification standpoint, but we're still overly reliant on tourism and construction and growth in general," said Will Weatherford, managing partner of private investment firm Weatherford Capital and former speaker of the Florida House of Representatives. "We've got to find a way to diversify our way out of that."

Those employment groups took some of the hardest hits during the initial phases of the pandemic.

According to the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity, there were 460,500 fewer leisure and hospitality jobs, which includes entertainment and food, this May than there were in the same month last year, a nearly 37-percent drop. Retail shed almost 100,000 jobs year-over-year in May.

Although these sectors have started to claw their way back up in the months since then, they were still underwater in July.

And while other areas of the economy, such as motor and recreational vehicle sales, are helping Florida achieve a partial recovery, those gains often don't help those looking for work.

Adding to the pain: Industries that shed the most jobs in Florida are among the lowest paying. So those out of work are more likely to have less in savings to weather the storm.

"The people that have had the biggest burden are the least able to shoulder that kind of burden with job loss," said Scott Brown, senior economist with Raymond James Financial.

Bob Morrison, the head of the Hillsborough County Hotel and Motel Association, said that at the start of the pandemic the tourism industry was push-



## Florida's economy relies on some of the industries hit hardest by the pandemic.

ing the state to fix the benefits system so it could help hotel employees suddenly out of work. But some of those workers were able to lean on federal programs that since have ended.

"Time has healed some of those gaps," Morrison said. "The challenge becomes, as we have new rounds of eligible team members, they don't have that federal support and Florida is one of the lowest-paying unemployment compensation benefit states in the country."

By some measurements, Florida may not have seen the worst of it yet. Lisa Castellano, a Tampa bankruptcy lawyer and partner at Genovese Joblove & Battista, said once banks' forbearance programs for mortgage payments expire, she expects a major uptick in bankruptcy filings from the hardest-hit industries — and not just by major chains like Stein Mart.

"We see the big names out there because they get the notoriety but I think

there's going to be a lot of the smaller to mid-size businesses as well," she said. "A lot of mom-and-pops, I don't think they're going to be able to make it."

Some sectors were better able to weather the changes. Finance and insurance lost less than 1,500 jobs between January and May. Many tech jobs already had experience being remote.

Here's the average hourly wage and average annual wage as of spring 2019 for common positions in some of the hardest hit industries, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics:

Contact Malena Carollo at [mc Carrollo@tampabay.com](mailto:mc Carrollo@tampabay.com) or (727) 892-2249. Follow @malenacarollo. Contact Emily L. Mahoney at [emahoney@tampabay.com](mailto:emahoney@tampabay.com). Follow @mahoneysthenname. Contact Jay Criddle at [criddle@tampabay.com](mailto:criddle@tampabay.com) or (727) 893-8336. Follow @JayCridlin. Contact Sara DiNatale at [sdinatale@tampabay.com](mailto:sdinatale@tampabay.com). Follow @sara\_dinatale.

### Food Services

**Bartenders:** \$12.72 an hour; \$26,460 annually  
**Restaurant cooks:** \$13.81; \$28,730  
**Servers:** \$12.66; \$26,340  
**Dishwashers:** \$10.96; \$22,810

### Retail

**Cashiers:** \$11.08 an hour; \$23,050 annually  
**Retail salesperson:** \$13.35; \$27,760  
**Retail sales supervisors:** \$22.17; \$46,110

### Hospitality

**Concierge:** \$13.70 an hour; \$28,500 annually  
**Tour and travel guides:** \$14.94; \$31,080  
**Lodging manager:** \$29.92; \$62,230  
**Amusement and recreation attendants:** \$11.23; \$23,360



**SUE CARLTON**  
Consumer affairs

## Pay up with a tap of the card

**I**t's a big consumer moment for me: My first tap-and-go credit card is on its way.

I know, I know. The technology that allows a purchaser to tap or hold the card close to the credit card reader and then dash off with their chai tea latte has been around awhile. Plenty of people already use it.

But consumers like me are starting to see them show up as replacements for expiring or lost credit cards, or as new ones, even when they didn't ask for tap technology.

Tap-to-pay cards are meant to be faster. And the big bonus in the time of coronavirus is that they're contactless, like paying with phones.

"We've seen a big rise during the pandemic of people who want to tap," said Ted Rossman, industry analyst at CreditCards.com. "Contactless is very popular in other countries. It's taken awhile to catch up in the U.S."

If I can share a prior consumer moment here: A couple of years ago in Tampa, I tried to purchase an ice tea by handing the cashier dollar bills, only to have him draw back and inform me that they did not accept cash, as if I'd tried to hand him a dead rat by the tail.

This was before the pandemic and us worrying so much about touching potentially germ-y things, so my cash was apparently just old-school and uncool. Instantly, I felt transformed into that person laboriously writing a check at the grocery store — remember checks? — or digging through every pocket for exact change while the line behind them silently seethes.

Now for tap-and-go credit cards.

According to credit card companies, payments are made using short-range wireless technology that lets a tap-enabled checkout terminal communicate with a tap-enabled card at a store or restaurant. And their websites are full of helpful how-tos for us neophytes.

You should be able to tell if a card or checkout terminal is tap-enabled because you'll see a contactless symbol of four curved lines increasing in size on the card or terminal. You hold your card 1 to 2 inches away or touch it to the reader. Your card gets read, and you're done.

Is it secure? A one-time code is created for each transaction that "secures the cardholder's payment information," says Visa.com. Even if a fraudster manages to get it, the information would be useless because it can't be reused, they say.

"It's safe to use," said Christina Tetreault, manager of financial policy at Consumer Reports. "Consumers shouldn't be afraid. The ease and convenience is

See **CARLTON, 2D**

**Q&A | Stewart Clark, Busch Gardens president**

## An exit interview with outgoing Busch Gardens prez

Parent company SeaWorld was already in rough waters before the pandemic. Clark's new job will be to enhance animal experiences.

BY SHARON KENNEDY WYNNE  
Times Staff Writer

Before Busch Gardens undergoes a change in leadership, with Six Flags alum Neal Thurman taking over the Tampa theme park on Tuesday, we sat down for an exit interview with Stewart Clark, who has overseen the park since 2017. In his time he has opened new roller coasters, shepherded the park through reopening during a pandemic and developed a friendship with a giraffe named Cupid.

Clark, 56, is a long-time executive with parent company SeaWorld Entertainment and was part of the team that in 2000 opened Discovery Cove, a tropical nature theme park with a free-flight aviary where you can swim with dolphins. He's moving back to Orlando to take over the new position of senior vice president of Zoo Commercial Operations for SeaWorld Entertainment.

Like all theme park operators, the company is hurting this year because of the pandemic. SeaWorld

Entertainment, Busch Gardens' parent company, recently reported a 95 percent revenue drop. But the water was already rough well before the pandemic for the company that Shamu built.

SeaWorld was rocked by declining attendance after the *Blackfish* documentary in 2013 raised questions about its treatment of orcas. That criticism, coupled with the record-breaking success of rivals at Disney and the Harry Potter land at Universal, saw a long slide in attendance

and revenues.

The company had started gaining ground in recent years, thanks to new attractions and rides that had nothing to do with sea creatures. And SeaWorld still aims to shore up its reputation among animal lovers. That's where Clark's new gig comes in.

Instead of helming one park, he will be overseeing zoological activities and experiences for all the company's seven theme parks and five water parks. In addition to high-

lighting the company's 50-year legacy of animal rescue, he will be looking for new "animal experiences" that will bring visitors closer to the critters in their care.

Here are some highlights of our interview on his last week.

### So this is a new position, how come?

As we talked as a company about what are our strengths, it's our commitment to the world and our zoo-



**Stewart Clark, 56, president of Busch Gardens**

See **CLARK, 2D**