

New LA dockworkers to be on the job this week

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LOS ANGELES -- The first group of temporary longshoremen chosen from among 300,000 applicants in Los Angeles-Long Beach should be trained and on the job by the end of this week.

James McKenna, president of the Pacific Maritime Association, said the lottery conducted by the PMA and International Longshore and Warehouse Union Thursday went off without a hitch. The first applicants were contacted Friday and will go through several days of testing and training procedures, he said.

The nation's largest container complex since June has been grappling with a severe shortage of longshore labor. The problem has been compounded by congestion on the intermodal rail system, requiring additional labor to manage the back up of containers on the docks. Also, shippers and carriers woefully underestimated cargo volumes this year in the eastbound Pacific, calling for a 5 percent to 8 percent increase when in fact containerized imports through Los Angeles-Long Beach are up about 14 percent through July.

The recent announcement by the ILWU and PMA that they were opening up the longshore rolls for the first time since 1997 set off a frenzy for the jobs that will eventually pay more than \$100,000 a year when workers achieve full-time status.

The union and the employer group expected about 30,000 mail-in applications but received more than 300,000, some from as far away as Europe, Asia and Australia.

Approximately 18,000 names were drawn in Thursday's lottery; half of those applications were submitted by friends and family of longshoremen already on the job. Officials then drew 3,000 names for the part-time jobs, known as casuals.

The ILWU and PMA intend to test and train at least 250 persons each week. Those who fulfill the requirements will become identified casuals. They will start work at a salary of about \$20 an hour, with no benefits.

As the part-timers accumulate sufficient hours on the job and positions open up on the waterfront, they'll be promoted to registered status, where their hourly wage will increase to about \$28 per hour with full benefits.

Meanwhile, the ILWU and PMA each month will promote at least 200 current casuals to registered status and train the workers to operate container lift equipment and other skill positions.

Time is critical as terminal operators in LA-Long Beach report each day that they are shorted dozens of work gangs because there are not enough skilled workers and casuals to fill the available job openings.