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## Faces of the Boom: Big Money Means Bigger Sacrifices

By: [Amy Dalrymple, Forum News Service](#), INFORUM

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Lee Strickland from Florida is the executive chef for the Muddy River Lodge. While six-week rotations are the norm, Strickland says he has worked up to 14 to 16 weeks at a time. Photo by Amy Dalrymple / Forum News Service



Raymond Macy, 50, of Duluth, Minn., is a baker at the Target Logistics Bear Paw Lodge in Williston. He hopes to continue working for another six years so he can retire to Hawaii. Photo by Amy Dalrymple / Forum News Service



Karen Smith from Utah works the front desk at a crew camp. She says she's happy to have the money to travel to watch her son graduate from the University of Notre Dame this spring. Photo by Amy Dalrymple / Forum News Service

**WILLISTON, N.D.** – Six weeks at a time, employees of a crew camp here work long shifts away from their families, supporting oil workers out in the field.

Some Target Logistics crew camp workers have been in Williston for two to three years, while others work the 84-hour weeks until they get out of debt or meet a goal.

Raymond Macy of Duluth, Minn., a baker at the Target Logistics Bear Paw Lodge, said the 12-hour days take a lot out of him, but he hopes the hours continue another six years so he can retire to Hawaii.

“This is a really good opportunity,” said Macy, 50, who has been working in Williston for three years. “But it does take a lot out of you. Not everybody can do it.”

Chédra Thomas of Savannah, Ga., learned about the Target Logistics job from her cousin who quit after six weeks.

When Thomas, a recent college graduate, heard how much money he made, she decided to apply. Thomas plans to work in North Dakota long enough to save money to move to Los Angeles and pursue a theater career.

“When you’re on a mission, you do what you’ve got to do,” said Thomas, who works in a camp store that sells energy drinks, toiletries and other items to workers.

The hourly wage at the camp is often lower than many other jobs in Williston, but workers say they make their money by getting more than 40 hours of overtime each week. Plus, the lodge provides housing, meals and other amenities for workers while they’re in North Dakota, which allows them to save more money.

While the shifts are long, workers say they like getting two weeks off every six weeks.

“I like the vacations,” said Laura Wagner of North Carolina. “I don’t want to give that up.”

Steve Blake of New Jersey was unemployed before he came to Williston in December 2011 after learning about the oil boom from a YouTube clip.

“I was about two paychecks from being homeless,” he said.

Blake, a sous chef for Bear Paw Lodge, said he and his wife have been able to get out of debt, and he wants to save at least \$35,000 to start a food truck business in New Jersey.

“Where we were a couple years ago was completely the other end of the spectrum,” Blake said.

But it doesn’t come without sacrifices. Blake hasn’t had a Christmas at home the past three years.

“My wife is a restaurant widow,” Blake said. “I don’t know if it’d work if I had kids.”

For Karen Smith, who is widowed and has adult children, getting two weeks off allows her to spend more quality with her family than when she was in Utah working two jobs.

Smith, who has worked in housekeeping at the camp and now works the front desk, said she will have time off and the money to travel to watch her son graduate from the University of Notre Dame this spring.

“That’s been a huge blessing,” said Smith, who has been in Williston since November 2011.

Smith no longer has a home, but has all of her belongings in storage. She takes classes online at night to work toward a goal of becoming an English professor. Smith said she's watched other workers come and go, but she'd like to do it a few more years.

"Whether you like it or not depends on your attitude in life," Smith said.

Lola Williams of Texas, who works the front desk overnight, makes a point to greet every worker, often encouraging them to smile on the cold winter mornings. Many of the workers, who are primarily men, share stories with her about their families back home.

"It helps me, too, because we all miss our families when we're up here," Williams said.

Lee Strickland took the bus from Florida to Williston about 2½ years ago. While looking for work, he quickly realized he needed a job that included housing due to the high cost of living in Williston.

Living at a crew camp, complete with recreation room, fitness center and computer room, was much different than Strickland had envisioned.

"They sold me when I saw the sauna," he said.

Strickland now is executive chef for the Muddy River Lodge, another Williston camp managed by Target Logistics. While six-week rotations are the norm, Strickland said he has worked up to 14 or 16 weeks at a time if there were staffing issues.

"It gets pretty demanding," he said.

But back in Florida, where Strickland worked in fine dining, his hours had been cut significantly.

"I don't plan on leaving anytime soon," Strickland said. "As long as this keeps going, I'll be here."

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Dalrymple is a Forum News Service reporter stationed in the Oil Patch.