

African-American Apprentices Entering the Building Trades

Mayor Villaraigosa leads effort to provide more construction job opportunities

Los Angeles Sentinel Staff Report

An estimated 25,000 jobs in the Building Trades will open up in the next ten years as a whole generation of skilled workers hits retirement age. To remedy this impending labor shortage, the City of Los Angeles is in the midst of a major effort to recruit more workers for this critical sector.

Under the leadership of Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and his staff, the City is partnering with local churches and the Building Trades around the Community Faith-Based Construction Initiative. In the past year this dynamic partnership has brought more than 500 African Americans from Los Angeles into this high-paying career path. The City has committed over \$1 million in grant funds to build on this effort.



Front row from left to right: LaTanya Jones, laborer; Greg Irish, executive director-Workforce Investment Board; Richard Benbow, general manager-Community Development Department; Ken Jones Jr., ironworker; Desrae Temple, electrician; Chris Moore, electrician; Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa; Artavia Gipson, electrician; Rev. Leonard Jackson, Mayor's staff; and John Reamer, Public Works Department, director-Bureau of Contract Administration. Second row from right to left: Robbie Hunter, ironworker; business manager; Vincent Lewis, electrician; Terrance Edwards, electrician; Chris Jefferson, electrician; Brian Youngblood, electrician; and James King, piledriver. Top row left to right: Shomari Davis, electrician, business manager; Deon Watson, electrician; Anton Evans, piledriver; John Thomas Jr., electrician; Ricky Thorpe, mason; George Tate Jr., electrician; and Eric Brown, electrician, business manager.

“At the Community Development Department, we administer the Mayor’s Community Faith Based Construction Initiative, and we know that jobs are key to a thriving community with self-sufficient families. We want candidates who are looking for a future for themselves and their families to step forward, tell us they want to work, and we will show them where the opportunities are,” said Richard Benbow, CDD General Manager.

A certified ironworker or electrician can earn upwards of \$50 an hour, including the value of benefits. City leaders want to make sure that Los Angeles residents are first in line for these career opportunities in the Building Trades.

“Los Angeles is in the midst of a construction boom, and that translates into good-paying jobs for our communities,” said Mayor Villaraigosa. “As we build the Los Angeles of the 21st Century, my office is committed to recruiting a local workforce that truly represents the community.”

Most public construction projects now require local hiring efforts, as well as mandating contractors to aggressively seek potential workers from underrepresented communities.

The UAW WorkSource Center at 3965 S. Vermont and PV JOBS are working diligently to prepare and place apprentices in the trades in collaboration with the outreach efforts of

United Job Creation Council (UJCC). Apprentices are then paid for a period of usually four years while they learn their craft in the classroom and on the job. After what they call “the other four year degree,” journeymen can take their skills with them almost anywhere in the country.

“A career in the construction and building trades is a good investment in your future,” says John Reamer, the Director of the Bureau of Contract Administration, L.A. Department of Public Works. He is responsible for enforcing the local hire efforts. “We’re out in the community helping people get trained, get qualified, get a job and start a career. The Mayor’s Office, the city departments, the clergy and the Building Trades are collaborating on a fantastic outreach program to reach new workers, and now is the time to take advantage of these resources.”

Terrance Edwards has been on the job for two months with IBEW Local 11, which is an electricians union. “I came out of the Marines without the type of skills to get a decent job,” said Edwards, “I heard about the Community/Faith-Based Construction Initiative. I signed up, took one session of training and...passed it on the first try. The initiative really helped me start a career.”

(Insert photo of Terence speaking at the one year Faith-Based check-in on 7/19 with appropriate caption)

There have been numerous success stories from the first year of the job recruitment and training effort. For example, the Painters Union inducted a group of 24 African-American ex-offenders into its apprenticeship program. Over the past year, the union has expanded the African-American participation in its apprenticeship program from 3% to 11% and opened up a training program near LAX.

The Carpenters provided apprenticeship opportunities to more than 40 Imperial Courts residents in South Los Angeles.

The Ironworkers Union has also been doing an outstanding job in recruitment and training for all interested candidates including ex-offenders and ex-gangmembers. Recently an exam, specially arranged by the Los Angeles Department of Building and Safety, was held for 36 Ironworker Apprentices who needed a Welder’s License to perform structural welding. The candidates attended training classes tailored for them. They devoted three hours each night studying and preparing for the test, which is a major career step. Passing the exam means they can earn more money and have a wider range of job choices. The good news is 80% of the Ironworkers who participated in the special study program, passed the exam. This is a huge success because the average passing rate is 50%. The Mayor met with the test takers to congratulate their success and restate his commitment to facilitating the development of the skilled workforce that the City needs because of the construction boom.

At a meeting to mark the first year’s progress, churches were referred to as “ground zero” in the recruitment and outreach for qualified candidates. Not everyone who applies will be able to enter the trades but the doors are definitely open. Qualified candidates will usually need to pass a drug test, provide a high school diploma or GED and have their own vehicle with insurance. Ministers and community organizations were reminded to continue to spread the word about the construction initiative, and to counsel, support and coach young recruits on how to be “job ready.”

Job seekers should call the UAW WorkSource Center at 323-730-7900 for more information on the Community/Faith-Based Construction Initiative. The Center is able to provide supportive services to qualified candidates. Recruitment and assessment workshops meet there every Thursday at 9 a.m. (3965 S. Vermont, just west of the Coliseum and north of King Blvd.)

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