



## LET'S TALK SHOP

By Arnesa A. Howell

**C**areer and technical education was once a staple of every student's middle or high school experience. If you're a certain age, you probably remember

*Continued on page 2*

## MAKING STRIDES: JOBS COALITION ACCOMPLISHMENTS



**W**hile raising awareness of workforce challenges and potential barriers to employment, the JOBS Coalition and its members have combined their resources and industry expertise to achieve the following results:

- Built the Bellevue Resource Center, a program facility serving the hard-to-reach, hard-to-employ, and returning ex-offender populations. The Center was completed on September 30, 2003.
- Guided the creation of the Construction & Design Academy at Cardozo, providing District students access, training, and preparation for careers in the construction industry and trades after graduation. The Academy officially opened in September 2005. □



**THE LINEUP** The roster for the Clergy Summit (l to r) included Margaret Singleton with the DC Chamber of Commerce, Otto Girr with Miller & Long, Diana Owen with The Justin Co. Inc., John McMahon of Miller & Long, Barbara Lang of the DC Chamber of Commerce and Theron Green with Bank of America.

## CLERGY AND BUSINESSES SHARE GOAL: INCREASED EMPLOYMENT FOR DISTRICT RESIDENTS

The table of panelists at the Clergy/Business Breakfast Summit spanned the spectrum of the business community: Miller & Long Concrete Construction, Bank of America, the DC Chamber of Commerce and the drywall subcontractor The Justin Co. Inc. Much of the audience represented the faith community, including host pastor Rev. Morris Shearin of Israel Baptist Church and Rev. Stephen Tucker, president of the JOBS Coalition. This unlikely business-clergy pairing came together for a common good: To help put hard-to-employ District residents to work.

By Arnesa A. Howell

**“**This summit was conceived as an idea from some of our business partners ... to come and talk with clergy,” said Tucker at the winter summit, acknowledging that businesses are “not the enemy” as the workforce development discussion takes center stage.

“Many of them have gone above and beyond the call of duty in trying to employ the harder-to-employ persons,” said Tucker, who has been tackling the issue of workforce development for some 20 years. “They have worked diligently in trying to set up apprenticeship

programs and special programs for those brothers and sisters who are hard to employ.”

The DC Chamber of Commerce, the Wednesday Clergy Fellowship and the JOBS Coalition sponsored the summit.

### The Business Circle

Barbara Lang, president and CEO of the DC Chamber of Commerce, said the Chamber's 1,700-plus members have always been focused on ensuring that District businesses are successful and that city residents are working.

*Continued on page 2*

**Let's Talk Shop** *Continued from page 1* being a teenager and the satisfaction of making toss pillows, edible delights or some useful wood products with your own hands in home economics or shop class. As a middle school student, I sat in class for six weeks beside my male counterparts and learned the importance of always wearing protective eyewear and watching one's hand placement when cutting with a saw. It wasn't something I initially thought I would enjoy, but I learned to love my weekly visits to shop class. By the end of the session, I'd created a paper towel holder – ends expertly carved to resemble the shape of a loaf of bread, stained a rich brown with floral embellishments burned into the sides. Although I'm not a craftswoman and knew I'd never pursue a skilled trade, I felt a sense of accomplishment and pride that brought a smile to my face – even decades later when I saw my handiwork still displayed (and put to good use) in my mom's kitchen.

Most young people will never experience that sense of achievement because vocational education is largely overlooked as part of the core curriculum in many school systems today. Generation X may remember woodworking as a regular class, but those of a younger generation are more familiar with social networking and “friending” on Facebook. To them, adventures in woodworking is nothing more than lore.

“Today's career and technical education is not what we were all used to,” said Carol Randolph, adviser to the JOBS Coalition, at a recent summit devoted to workforce development in Washington, D.C. But Randolph said that some schools in the District like McKinley Technical High School and the Hospitality High School at Roosevelt are doing “great work” in this area.

“Eighty-three percent of their students are graduating,” she said. And the graduation rate at the Academy of Construction and Design at Cardozo Senior High School is in the 90th percentile, with two-thirds of the graduates going on to college.

“We are looking to try and make a difference with the next generation,” Randolph declared. “We believe a career in technical education is the way of doing it.”

But proponents of teaching the skilled trades in schools still have to climb a wall of opposition. Randolph calls it the Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois battle. Both men were prominent leaders in education theory, but with divergent philosophies. DuBois believed college education paved the way to success, while Washington believed industrial trades and agriculture were the best ways to overcome social injustices and gain racial equality. Some parents are hold-

*Continued on page 4*



**NOT A BLAME GAME**  
JOBS Coalition President Rev. Stephen Tucker stresses that businesses are “not the enemy.”

**SUCCESSFUL STRIDES**  
The apprenticeship program at The Justin Co. Inc. is filled with District residents who are ex-offenders, says Diana Owen, the vice president of business development.

**Clergy Summit** *Continued from page 1*

Businesses drive the economy in the District, but when people don't have jobs, they are not contributing to the local economy, she explained.

“It becomes difficult to attract businesses and investments, and that lack of economic activity doesn't do any of us any good,” Lang said, adding that a major concern is that District residents fill D.C. jobs. Why?

District residents fill only one-third of the more than 700,000-plus jobs in the nation's capital on any given day.

“That means [two-thirds of] our dollars earned by workers here in D.C. are taken home to Maryland, Virginia and other nearby states,” she pointed out, “and that's because we're the only city in America that cannot tax the income where it is earned, [due to a mandate from] Congress.” With D.C. dollars flowing out to the suburbs, she continued, city residents and businesses are left to pay taxes and fund District government operations.

So with businesses hiring the most qualified candidate for the job, it's necessary to make District residents as competitive in the job market as our neighbors to the north and the west of Washington, D.C.

**We Need a Resolution**

The first step to addressing this challenge is ensuring that the city has a first rate education system, she says. “Kids in D.C. are as smart as anywhere else, but they need to be given the right tools to learn and to grow,” Lang emphasized. “And the education reform that began under Mayor [Adrian] Fenty and now continues in a very robust way under Mayor [Vincent] Gray is certainly the right step.”

Admitting this will not be an “overnight fix,” she added that it would likely take 10 years

*Continued on page 3*



**CHALLENGES AHEAD**  
DC Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Barbara Lang asserts the need to make District residents competitive in the workforce.

**Clergy Summit** *Continued from page 2*  
before observers would fully see the results of the reform efforts.

Secondly, D.C. needs “top notch” adult education programs because many residents are unprepared for the job opportunities available in the city today. “We have a population in our city that either failed K through 12, or K through 12 failed them,” said Lang.

Still, she said it’s important to understand that many residents will never reach the corporate ranks of partner in a law firm or an accountant, so it’s important to attract companies with substantial entry-level opportunities.

Other unique challenges in the District include the large proportion of residents with criminal records, a huge barrier to employment. “But there are ways that we can work together to make our previously incarcerated individuals more competi-

tive,” said Lang. That is why the Chamber partnered with the Council for Court Excellence for a report called, *Unlocking Employment Opportunity for Previously Incarcerated Persons in the District of Columbia*, offering recommendations to help this demographic find employment. The Chamber also supports the Gray administration’s “One City, One Hire” initiative, with the goal of having every District business hire one unemployed resident.

**Coming to the Table**

Miller and Long Concrete Construction is among the companies with a track record of hiring ex-offenders and helping people get a foot in the door with entry-level positions. Company Chairman John McMahon stressed the need for more programs that encourage and reward for hiring. He also reiterated the importance of educating young people, and pointed to the success of the



**MAKING A DIFFERENCE**  
Miller & Long Vice President of Human Resources Otto Girr says the company works to give ex-offenders a second chance.

Academy of Construction and Design at Cardozo Senior High School as an example. “Job training starts at a very early age, and if we don’t keep kids motivated and if we don’t catch them at the seventh and eighth grades, we can lose them to the streets,” said McMahon.

Meanwhile, Otto Girr, vice president of human resources for Miller & Long, echoed the positive efforts the company has made in hiring ex-offenders by sharing that Miller & Long has 16 formerly incarcerated individuals participating in its apprenticeship program. “Little by little, we’re making a difference,” he said.

“At Miller & Long, we make sure guys who want a second chance get one,” Girr continued, saying the company has a bimonthly support group for ex-offenders so they can discuss issues like family problems and work issues.

From the small business perspective, Diana Owen of the drywall subcontractor The Justin Co. Inc., said this three-year old company has an apprenticeship program where all the participants are D.C. residents who are ex-offenders. “We’ve

*Continued on page 4*

**JOBS Coalition Pathways**

- Managing Editor:** Arnesa A. Howell
- Executive Editor:** Carol Randolph
- Copy Editor:** Pam Ellison
- Contributors:** Arnesa A. Howell
- Graphic Design:** Jenn French Designs, LLC
- Photographer:** Imagine Photography
- Board of Directors:** Robert Braunohler, Bill Dean, Lynn C. French, Balchander Jayaraman, John McMahon, Debra Schoonmaker, Rev. Stephen Tucker, I. Margaret White, Hal Williams
- JOBS Coalition Legal Adviser:** Roderic Woodson

The *JOBS Coalition Pathways* is the exclusive property of the JOBS Coalition, 633 Park Road, NW, Washington, D.C. 20010; 202-726-7400. *JOBS Coalition Pathways* is dedicated to disseminating information that will help strengthen the city’s apprenticeship training and job placement programs, broadening the scope to reach the young, the underserved, the unemployed and the returning ex-offender. *JOBS Coalition Pathways* is published by the Jobs Coalition.

### Let's Talk Shop *Continued from page 2*

ing firm to the thought that if their kids pursue trades like plumbing and masonry, they can't pursue a college degree or be successful. Not true.

"Working with their hands and their heads in many instances can help students stay in school," Randolph concluded.

Even students who decide vocational trades aren't their career aspiration could benefit from having access to such courses in school. Students would be exposed to new skills that would enhance their knowledge base. Exposure could boost team building with their peers, spark an interest in another field – like the arts – or even plant the seed for a new hobby. And the college-bound student would be a more well-rounded applicant – and that's something to be proud of! □

### Clergy Summit *Continued from page 3*

had a lot of successes," said Owen, the vice president of business development.

This collaboration sets the stage for businesses and clergy to be changemakers. With its dedicated presence within neighborhoods across the city, the faith community is in a unique position to connect with the hardest-to-employ residents through their congregations and outreach initiatives. Meanwhile, businesses can employ the most in-need residents or even offer support by promoting financial literacy, which can benefit individuals whose best option might be setting up their own businesses. The discussion may be in its early stages, but Tucker is already working to bring even more businesses to the table to discuss the challenges surrounding workforce development. □

## JOBS COALITION PROMISES

- Provide opportunities for District residents to secure gainful employment.
- Remove barriers that prevent meaningful employment.
- Provide educational and training opportunities for all District residents interested in pursuing careers in various industries and trades.
- Work toward the creation of a comprehensive, fair, and more open system of training and hiring the underserved, unemployed, and returning ex-offenders.
- Ensure that the training and educational skills being taught are relevant to the job market of today and tomorrow.
- Engage elected and appointed officials to support legislation and maintain appropriate oversight to ensure gainful employment for District residents, including the underserved, unemployed, and returning ex-offenders.

## JOBS COALITION MISSION STATEMENT

**W**e will work together to develop a long-term strategy that creates an environment where aspiring District residents will have unprecedented opportunity to succeed. We strive to create a fair and open system, supported by government, industry, employers and the education and faith-based communities, which seeks to properly train today's apprentices while making an unparalleled commitment to educating students and others not yet in the workforce.

JOBS COALITION  
633 Park Road, NW  
Washington, DC 20010

