

GRANT JOHNSON

GREEN PATHWAY DC: A GOODWILL SUCCESS STORY

By Joye Mercer Barksdale
STORY INSIDE ON PAGE 2 >>



A TEAM EFFORT
ACAD students, the Mayor's Green Summer JOBS Corps, and DC Habitat for Humanity join forces for a cause.

MAKING STRIDES: JOBS COALITION ACCOMPLISHMENTS



While 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.
- > Leading the Children of Mine Center, in partnership with the Architecture Research Institute at the University of the District of Columbia, in designing, planning and developing a new community center in the Anacostia/Hillsdale community, and restoring the historic home of the city's first mayor. □

NEW HOMES FOR FAMILIES IN NEED:

ACAD PARTNERS WITH DC HABITAT

The cookie cutter townhouses off Clay and 53rd Street in Northeast Washington, D.C. stand out among the rundown apartment complexes surrounding them. With their natural-hued exteriors in muted greens, sky blues, and earthen tans, the DC Habitat for Humanity development is a source of hope and renewal for the families who have put in 300 hours of "sweat equity" to help build their new homes. But these homes also spark pride for another group—the students of the Academy of Construction & Design (ACAD) at Cardozo Senior High School, who are volunteering their time over summer vacation helping to construct homes for families in need. *By Arnesa A. Howell*

"Helping others—and giving back to families—is one of the things we must do," says 2009 ACAD graduate Freddy Possian, who had since early morning gladly hung drywall in one of the newly constructed homes alongside participants of the Mayor's Green Summer JOBS Corps and other volunteers. Although the mercury topped 85 degrees outside (and undoubtedly even higher in the confines of the unfinished home), Possian didn't seem to notice.

"It's hot, but I don't think about it because I'm focused on what I'm doing," says the lanky 20 year old, clearly enthusiastic about bringing the classroom knowledge and training he'd

gained as a student at ACAD to the work site.

"You can use the skills from the Academy on-site and in real life," he shares. In fact, the incoming freshman at Pennsylvania State this fall is hard at work building a cabinet for his dorm room.

On the Job

Fellow volunteer and ACAD student Ivan Ango, 17, showed the signs of his hard work—covered in dust from head to toe and wearing a tool belt, equipped with hammer and utility knife, slung around his waist. The rising senior at Cardozo says the "fun" of working on this Habitat project is using the electric drill and

Continued on page 2

When Grant Johnson returned to Washington, D.C. after spending several years in federal and state prisons, he couldn't yet envision his future. But he was sure of one thing: it would look nothing like his past. Green Pathway DC, a free training program that Goodwill of Greater Washington administers in coordination with the Green Builders Council of DC, would be his road to a new life.

Johnson, 35, came back to D.C. in 2008 after seven years and nine months in a federal prison for weapons and gun charges; before then, he'd been incarcerated at age 16 in a Virginia state prison for malicious wounding. He credits his time in federal prison for making him "grow up and look at life completely differently." His perspective also changed when he had a daughter, born just three months before his federal sentence began. "To be in an institution and not be with my daughter—that was my wake-up call," he says.

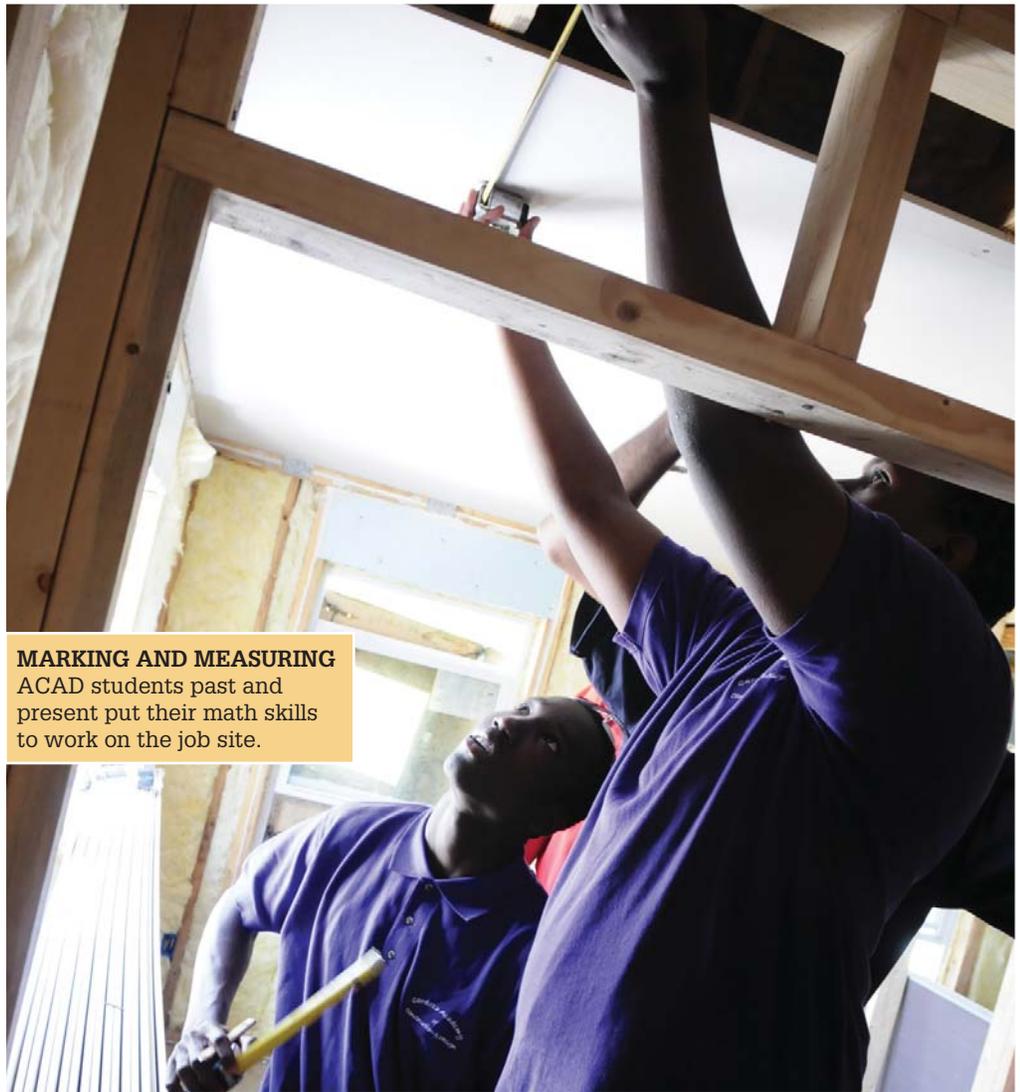
Once out, Johnson desperately sought career training and made countless calls and visits looking for job openings. Everywhere he looked, programs were full, calls weren't returned, and promised opportunities didn't materialize. Training programs had long waiting lists and Johnson became increasingly frustrated. "The opportunities you think you'll have, you just don't get," he says.

Then, his probation officer told him about the Goodwill program. Johnson jumped at the chance. Today, he works for Elio Brothers Services, a D.C.-based construction company, and admits: "This is the first time in my life I've ever received a paycheck. I keep all my pay stubs—every single one of them."

Goodwill has offered the 10- to 15-week program (formerly called Pre-Apprenticeship Readiness Training) since 2005, says Colleen Paletta, Goodwill's vice president of training and employment services. It provides the National Center for Construction Education and Research core curriculum, which includes basic safety, blueprint reading, introductions to hand tools and power tools, as well as basic rigging and CPR/first aid. The program includes math skills instruction, visits to job sites, employability skills, career counseling, mentoring and job placement assistance. Students must also submit to two rounds of drug testing, because random testing is common in construction.

The Associated Builders and Contractors of Metro Washington has been a long-time partner in the program. "Our role has included consulting on the overall curriculum and providing the construction skills curriculum, lining up instructors, providing classrooms for

Continued on page 3



MARKING AND MEASURING
ACAD students past and present put their math skills to work on the job site.



New Homes *Continued from page 1*

marking and measuring materials. Sometimes, he admits, there are trials and errors: "If wrong, you have to measure again." But Ango says he enjoys doing the math. And what brings him even more pleasure?

"I like it when I come back and see that the house I've worked on is done and people are living in it," says the repeat DC Habitat volunteer, who aspires to become a bioelectrical or electrical engineer.

Feeling Proud

ACAD instructors like Marshall Janifer, who teaches carpentry, were happy to see the students

putting their "classroom learning to the test."

By working on the DC Habitat site, Ango and Possian are learning to be part of a team effort while gaining important problem-solving skills, he says.

Meanwhile, ACAD electrical instructor Richard Lawrence says he's proud to see the students' accomplishments and how much they have grown since going through the program at Cardozo. The partnership between the Academy and DC Habitat, he adds, is beneficial to everyone involved.

"It teaches community service and [enables the students to] demonstrate the skills they learn in the classroom," Lawrence explains. "Habitat does a great service for the community." □

SPOTLIGHT ON CONSTRUCTION

Considering a career in construction? Well, it might be a smart move. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Career Guide to Industries, the job opportunities in this field are “excellent” for experienced workers. *By Arnesa A. Howell*



PILLARS OF SUPPORT

(From left) Michelle Lucas, director of training and employment services at Goodwill of Greater Washington, and Graduate Grant Johnson, beside one of his mentors and case manager, Joe Mitko.



Green Pathway *Continued from page 2*

the program, and lining up potential employers for the job fair,” says Jason Roberts, ABC of Metro Washington’s director of education. Green Pathway is a good fit for the organization because it meets the needs of two different groups: employers in search of prepared and qualified workers to fulfill the District’s “First Source” requirements in hiring, and D.C. residents who are interested in construction careers “but need some help and basic job skills training to become reliable, successful employees.”

To keep current, Goodwill has added “green” electives in sustainable building, weatherization and smart-meter installation. “As the industry is changing and evolving, so too is our program,” says Paletta. “We want our students to be prepared when they go into the working world.”

Johnson enrolled in 2009, one of about 20 students in his class, most of whom were ex-offend-

ers. “We made it our duty to get there and pay attention every day. I never focused on anything that intensely in my life,” he shares. Before the first week was over, the students had bonded. “To this day, we’re still calling each other.”

And Johnson—who always struggled with math—found himself getting A’s in the subject. He credits the instructor with breaking it down and making it understandable. “We laughed when she started with elementary math. But within two or three weeks, people who had problems with division were actually doing algebra,” he recalls.

That kind of approach, says Paletta, explains how the program transforms lives. “Not everyone makes it, but a lot of people have benefited and seen their lives actually change,” she says. But Paletta lamented that there is far more demand for the program than there are spaces. Currently, the only source of funding is the D.C. Department of

Continued on page 4

Equally encouraging, the field offers significant opportunities for those with an entrepreneurial spirit. “Construction offers more opportunities than most other industries for individuals who want to own and run their own business,” BLS stated. From the business side to the labor aspect of the field, there is what some might consider good money to be made. An industry snapshot found that nonsupervisory workers could earn more than \$780 a week, while those in highway, street, and bridge construction can draw salaries of \$900 plus a week.

“[T]he construction trades workers needing more education and training, such as electricians and plumbers, get paid more than construction trades workers requiring less education and training, including laborers and helpers,” the guide stated.

Continued job growth and the anticipated need to replenish workers leaving the occupation over the next decade are expected to strengthen the number of opportunities in this industry. And a surprising boost to the field: stereotyping, or what BLS calls “blue collar bias.” There is a common misperception that blue collar equates to low status, a thought many industry observers continue to fight.

So don’t count construction out!

For more information, visit: www.bls.gov. □

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The *JOBS Coalition Pathways* is the exclusive property of the JOBS Coalition, 4409 South Capital Street, SW Washington, D.C. 20032; 202-373-1959. *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.

Green Pathway *Continued from page 3*

Employment Services. The now-defunct National Capital Revitalization Corp. provided support initially, and from 2005 through 2007, 270 students enrolled. But because financial support has diminished with the troubled economy, space is more limited. Forty students enrolled in the program earlier this year, and another 35 enrolled in the latest cycle that began in September.

Paletta says current eligibility requirements, unfortunately, may also limit enrollment. Students must provide a birth certificate, GED or high school diploma, District government I.D., Social Security card, Selective Service registration verification—documents that ex-offenders often don't have.

Students who complete the program are able to interview with a variety of construction companies, from large to small, both union and non-union shops. Ultimately, the program provides not only the foundation for a new career, but a

sense of personal victory and accomplishment.

"For a lot of individuals, this is the first time they've ever completed anything," says Paletta. "Just to hear the personal testimonies and the ways in which the program has transformed people's thinking and actions has been incredibly rewarding. That's what keeps me motivated when funding goes away, and when we can't serve as many people and when the economy goes down and there aren't as many jobs...remembering those individuals who have come through the program and are still working."

The day before Johnson's class graduated, Goodwill sponsored a job fair. That's where Johnson connected with Elio Brothers, which was looking for drywallers. "I told Mr. Elio 'I'm willing to help your company grow. I want to work. All I need is a chance.'"

Graduation day was April 24, 2009. Johnson got his chance when he started work the following week. □

JOBS COALITION PROMISES

- Provide opportunities for District residents to secure gainful employment opportunity.
- 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

We 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.

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