

Mississippi's ReBuilding Center Reshapes Our Thinking



PHOTO BY JAKE THOMAS/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER
 Laura Schmidt wades through the stacks of salvaged wood planks that line a warehouse of The ReBuilding Center on Mississippi Avenue. The supplier of home and office construction materials celebrates 10 years this week.

Green Economy or Green Divide?

continued **▲** from Front

During an April visit to Portland, Marc Morial, the president and chief executive officer of the National Urban League expressed concern to reporters that the country would have "green apartheid" or a "green divide" if minorities didn't have requisite training for these jobs.

He stated that the Urban League was making it a priority to prevent this by providing such training, and proudly mentioned that the league had already trained 18,000 people for weatherization work and other green jobs.

There are a number of local organizations that are gearing up to make sure the green economy doesn't bypass the economically disadvantaged.

The Irvington Covenant Community Development Corpora-

tion recently entered into a partnership with the United Way and Oregon Tradewomen Inc. to develop a pre-training program aimed at putting marginalized people on the path to get good jobs doing things like installing wind turbines and solar panels and retrofitting buildings to be more energy efficient.

Some landscaping jobs pay a starting wage as low as \$8 an hour and go up to \$18, said Hipólito.

Barbara Byrd, a senior instructor at the University of Oregon's Labor, Education and Research Center and secretary-treasurer for the Oregon AFL-CIO, points out that low income people often have a litany of personal problems that prevent them from any employment. They may have bad credit, or need help paying for child care.

"It's hard for them to even reach that first rung of the ladder," she said.

Karin Martinson, a researcher at the Urban Institute, said that there are better-paying high end green jobs, often found in engineering and architecture that are more difficult for

low-income workers to break into. She added that trainers can overcome this problem by working closely with employers to match skills with job demand.

But this isn't deterring Samuel Martinez, a 49-year-old immigrant from Vera Cruz, Mexico. Wearing a plaid work shirt, he said in Spanish that he likes doing something for the environment, and it already pays better than the service industry jobs he used to work.

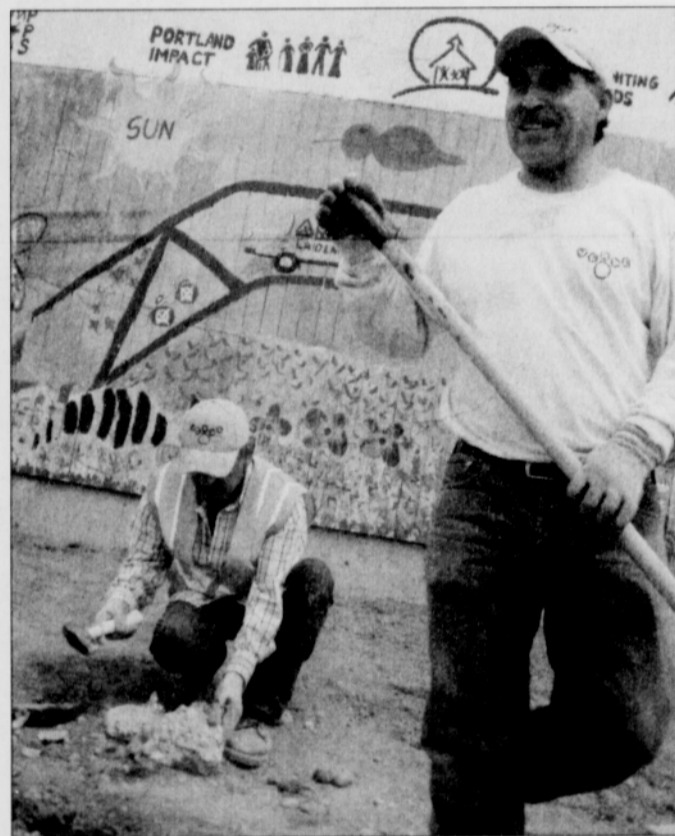


PHOTO BY JAKE THOMAS/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER
 Jose Nuñez Sr. gets training in green landscaping while building a bioswale, a catch basin to absorb pollutants from rain runoff.

tion recently entered into a partnership with the United Way and Oregon Tradewomen Inc. to develop a pre-training program aimed at putting marginalized people on the path to get good jobs doing things like installing wind turbines and solar panels and retrofitting buildings to be more energy efficient.

"What we're trying to accomplish with training is to level the playing field," said Pat Daniels, the director of the covenant's community growth division.

But just because the economy is developing a green tint doesn't necessarily mean that people are going to be hoisted out of poverty in droves.

Mary King, a labor economist at Portland State University, is quick to point out that green

Parking Taken, Neighbors Stunned

continued **▲** from Front

According to Portland Transportation Department spokesperson Maureen Yandle, the proposal did not require any public notice to the residents of the 38-unit apartment or Reach Community Development, the owners of the building, because the complex was not directly

adjacent to the reserved parking request.

There also is no ability to appeal the decision, Yandle said.

After several days of inquiries, the Portland Observer was still waiting at press time Tuesday for a comment from Northeast Precinct department officials, including Commander Jim Ferraris.

continued **▲** from Front

non-profit that runs the ReBuilding Center seeks to encourage people to discover the energy and talents of their community members.

Laura Schmidt, Americorp communications assistant, said that the non-profit recently

helped facilitate a neighborhood workshop on food sharing, which helped people find out more about using local ingredients and new ways to cook.

It also extends to the rebuilding center, which prides itself on its diverse workforce and efforts to hire people from the surrounding neighborhood that

has been shaken and stirred from years of rapid economic revitalization.

"That person is not just somebody with buying power it's a fellow community member who brings their own ideas and can help us support the mission," said Bekemeier of people who enter the center.



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