

# Construction training helps build careers

By Mark Curnutte • [mcurnutte@enquirer.com](mailto:mcurnutte@enquirer.com) • July 26, 2010

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Gwen Washington worked three years as a driver at Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky International Airport.

She was laid off in the middle of 2008 and could not find another job.

"I was in a rut," the 46-year-old Mount Airy woman said.

She then heard about a construction training program at the Urban League of Greater Cincinnati. Yet, the Urban League turned out to be just one of the nonprofits involved in the Construction Connections pre-apprenticeship program.

The strength of other agencies and their programs, especially the Cincinnati Arts and Technology Center, which had operated its own construction-training program since 2006, better prepared Washington and the other graduates to compete for a job.

The agency marriage paired with the Urban League's ability to recruit and placed potential workers with the center's training program.

The result for graduates is simply stated.

"I felt prepared," said Washington, now working full time for Messer Construction.

She's on the job in a research building at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center. A

general laborer with the company, responsible for cleaning and transporting demolition debris, she says it's the best job she's ever had.

Washington went through three weeks of résumé-writing and interview skills training at the Urban League and five more weeks at the center learning specifics of the construction industry, including learning how to drive a Bobcat.

"We're getting better employees," said Don Elbert, a Messer project manager and one of Washington's supervisors. "They are better trained. They know more about what they're doing."

Washington was one of 16 people in the first Construction Connections graduating class. Fifteen graduated. Thirteen are employed.

The program, which will train 230 people, is paid for with \$200,000 from the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services.

Money goes to student services, such as application fees and child care, as well as materials. At graduation, the students receive a certificate, as well as steel-toe boots, safety glasses, hard hat, gloves and tools.

Besides the Urban League and the center, other agencies involved in the training include Cincinnati-Hamilton County Community Action Agency, Easter Seals Work Resource Center and Butler Technology and Career Development Schools.

The bulk of the training, 100 hours - or 20 hours a week over five weeks - takes place at the Cincinnati Arts and Technology Center in Longworth Hall on Pete Rose Way.

The center graduated 10 classes of students in its construction program, ranging in age from their early 20s to late 50s, before joining with the Urban League.

"The goal is to give our students as many advantages as possible," said Clara Martin, center chief executive.

The center already had affiliations with other institutions in its construction trades program, including Cincinnati State Technical and Community College and the Messer and HGC construction companies.

Another new graduate, Marcus Jasper, 39, of Golf Manor, is working with HGC in a project on Vine Street in Over-the-Rhine. "The more skills I can have under my belt, the better," said Jasper, who had a landscaping job but was looking for something better. "The program really helped to prepare me for every aspect of the job."

The jobs are there.

Mike Huseman, HGC Construction president, called the new program an ideal way "to match hard-working, certified construction workers with companies like ours. There is a need for qualified workers."



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