

## **City launches construction job-training program**

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In an effort to train low-income city residents for construction jobs, the Baltimore Workforce Investment Board has tapped a national trade group to run a pre-apprenticeship program in East Baltimore, home to a massive \$800 million redevelopment.

Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC), a national association representing 23,000 industry firms across the country, will oversee training and work-placement initiatives, with an eye on eventually connecting graduates to apprentice positions.

The pre-apprenticeship program will recruit city residents with a high school diploma and sixth-grade math and reading levels for training two nights a week over four months, organizers said. Half of those picked will live in East Baltimore.

The program is backed with \$500,000 in grants from the Annie E. Casey Foundation and Open Society Institute-Baltimore. Recruiting is scheduled to begin this month.

The \$800 million East Baltimore Redevelopment Project is a sweeping initiative anchored by new housing and a biotechnology research park. That and other city construction projects are expected to create more than 2,500 jobs a year through 2010. Electricians, carpenters, roofers, plumbers, pipelayers and masons will be in particular demand.

Mike Henderson, president of ABC's Baltimore chapter, said in a statement it was "critical that local residents get the opportunity to realize economic benefits from the tremendous investment that is taking place in East Baltimore."

"We're not just looking to place people in jobs," Henderson added. "We need skilled craftsmen and women and want to give them the chance at a lifelong career. Construction has unlimited career opportunities -- the key is training."

John W. Ashworth III, chairman of the Baltimore Workforce Investment Board, said in a statement ABC and its partners had developed "a compelling training and employment package that emphasizes employment and advancement."

A 2003 study of the city's construction industry by the Annie E. Casey Foundation found a large demand for skilled construction workers but a lack of training opportunities.

Executives with the Mayor's Office of Employment Development and the Job Opportunities Task Force, a city-based non-profit group, said both organizations will work closely with ABC to expand pre-apprenticeship programs.

"This program is just the beginning," Jason Perkins-Cohen, executive director of the Job Opportunities Task Force, said in a statement. "With the expected demand for workers in the construction industry, more work needs to be done to enable Baltimore City residents to obtain opportunities in the skilled trades."

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