

Skills Training

Training part of Toronto procurement

Ten young people learn skills during community hub project

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CORRESPONDENT

Toronto Mayor David Miller has announced that a pilot program designed to train and employ youths in the construction field will form a permanent component of the city's procurement program.

Miller made the announcement at the April 30 opening of a youth-focused community hub at 1652 Keele Street, where 10 young people living in the Weston-Mt. Dennis neighbourhood participated in the construction process to help develop marketable skills.

"This is the first time that the City of Toronto has linked its procurement practices to its commitment to community development," said Miller.

"The City of Toronto used this project to test the idea that when we build something we should use it as a training opportunity for young people from the neighbourhood in which it's built.

"I'm very proud to say that, as part of our normal procurement process, from now on the City of Toronto is going to do that everywhere possible."

The hub includes a computer room, lounge, dance floor, kitchen, boardroom and offices, and was principally planned and built by local youth, who also assisted in tendering.

Of the 10 young people from the neighbourhood trained to work on the project, five have attained further employment in the build-

ing trades, and one has gone back to school to prepare for an apprenticeship.

"The remaining young people are in a good position to obtain employment when the construction season gains momentum," said Miller.

The general contractor on the project was Toronto's HSI Solutions, which submitted bids, along with other contractors, that included provisions to hire local youth as workers and to supply an on-site trainer.

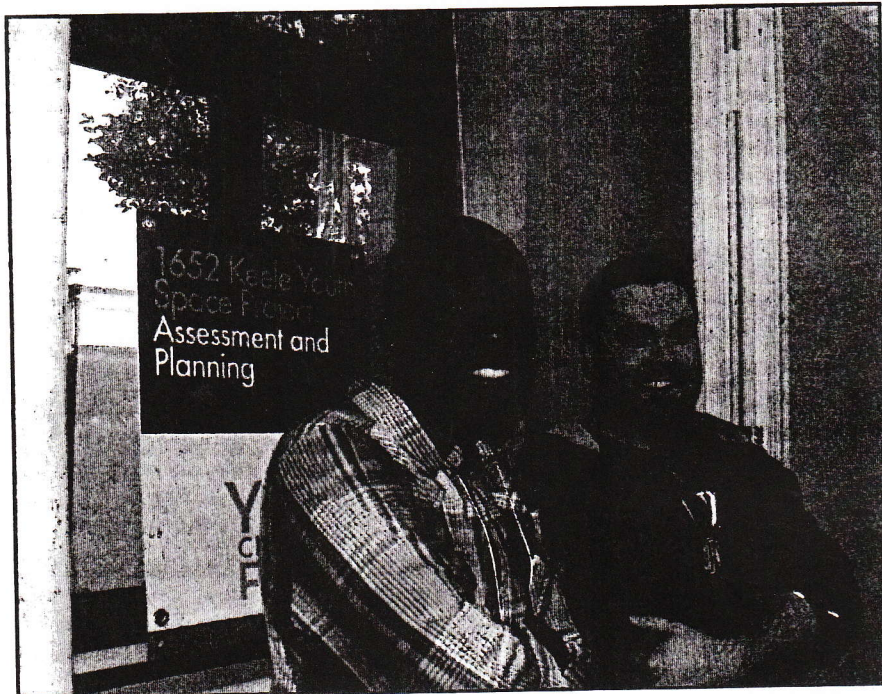
"HSI Solutions rose to the challenge of working in a different way to continue the skills development and training of young people during the construction phase," said Miller. "HSI staff were excellent mentors."

Lead hand carpenter Victor Bunnaman was the on-site mentor for HSI. "This wasn't just a public relations effort," he noted. "They were expected to work hard and the results demonstrate the quality of their work."

The young workers were also trained through the Carpenters' Local Union 27 Joint Apprenticeship and Training Trust Fund, with a special emphasis on safety instruction. All hours spent working on the project were eligible to apply to the first year of an apprenticeship.

Oneil Barnes and James Cericola were two of the 10 local workers who took part in the construction project. Barnes and Cericola are currently members of Local 27.

Barnes will be completing his basic schooling at the union training centre and is



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Oneil Barnes (left) and James Cericola were two of 10 workers who took part in a pilot program designed to train and employ Toronto youths in the construction field.

working as a carpenter for M.J. Dixon Construction Ltd. in Mississauga. Cericola was employed by HSI on recent projects.

"On the pre-apprenticeship we did at least five different trades," said Barnes. "We did drywall, we did fram-

'They were expected to work hard and the results demonstrate the quality of their work'

ing, we did plaster, floors, painting. We did everything hands-on from scratch. I did

half the floor I'm standing on right now."

What did Cericola do? "Everything this guy did," said Cericola, pointing to Barnes. "It was a great experience."

Mike Yorke, president of Carpenters and Allied Workers Local 27, says he would like to see the model replicated in other Toronto construction projects.

"We were proud to play a role in this project both because of what it means to the community and because of what it means to our organization," he says.

"When something needs to be done, the carpenters can step up to the plate and help the community."

Yorke notes that he was "just a face in a crowd" at the hub's ribbon-cutting cer-

emony, while Barnes, who addressed attendees, received well-deserved attention.

"When that young man announced that he was now an active member of the Carpenter's Union, and working in a construction job building a library, the whole place cheered," says Yorke.

"He's moved on and is going to make his own place in the construction industry in this city."

The project was initiated by the For Youth Initiative, a charitable organization, and supported by a \$1.38 million grant from Ontario's Youth Challenge Fund.

The City of Toronto contributed \$280,000 to the project through its Partnership Opportunities Legacy Fund.