

Garden State Alliance for a New Economy (GANE) and Laborers Union Local 55 Weatherization Initiative

Key barrier to workforce development in northern New Jersey: The lack of good jobs¹

- Just as African-Americans were breaking into them, the good blue-collar jobs left the country
- Globalization destroyed rural economies in Central America, flooding the US with very vulnerable immigrant workers

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act must help to overcome these barriers, by creating new high-quality blue-collar jobs that the workers who most need them can access.

Weatherization at large enough scale to address climate change, will create thousands of new blue-collar jobs. GANE, the Garden State Alliance for a New Economy, and Laborers Local 55 did a 30-home pilot project in January to demonstrate that green jobs in weatherization can be good jobs (living wages, benefits, access to training and ongoing employment referrals), and to make sure low-income African-American and immigrant workers in Newark can access those jobs. We are now working toward city- and state-level policy that advances these ends.

Strengths of a Community-Based, Labor-Linked Approach to Workforce Development

In March, 23 people entered a rigorous, six-week green construction/weatherization training program. On April 27th, 22 people will graduate.

- **We took a community organizing approach to recruitment of trainees.**

During the recruitment process, trainees were invited to engage in multiracial dialogues about what we are all up against in Newark in 2009 and how we are going to change it together. They were invited to attend City Council meetings and knock on doors in the rain. This process weeded out the short-term thinkers. It also had the positive side-effect of bringing in women, who came for the change work and stayed for the construction training.

- **We partnered with a labor union**

The union gave trainees access to extremely high-quality training facilities and staff, and also the potential to access a hiring hall connected to a network of employers.

- **We partnered with an unusual labor union**

The Laborers Union chartered a new Local, Laborers 55, to represent workers in residential weatherization. Laborers 55 is committed to a deep partnership with community-based organizations. It is also a new local with no existing members and a commitment building a diverse membership and leadership.

GANE, the Garden State Alliance for a New Economy, is a partnership of labor unions and community-based organizations that promotes economic development with broad public benefits (www.ganenj.org). GANE is part of the national Partnership for Working Families network (www.communitybenefits.org).

¹ Gerald Lenoir of the Black Alliance for Just Immigration has worked with GANE to frame this issue. As we work to develop training and paths to entry for African-American workers who have often been shut out of weatherization work in our region, it has been key to avoid pitting them against the largely immigrant workforce doing much of that work now.