



Gulf Coast Workforce Development Initiative Continues to Make Progress

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November 2006

Born from the devastation of hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005, the Business Roundtable-led Gulf Coast Workforce Development Initiative continues to make progress toward its goal of recruiting and training up to 20,000 new construction workers in the gulf coast region by the end of 2009. Beginning as a concept in December 2005, the initiative has since raised nearly \$5,000,000 in cash and in-kind service commitments and has matured into a crusade for positive action in the Gulf Coast.

Working in partnership with federal and state government agencies, labor organizations, owners, contractors, industry associations and local community colleges, the initiative has trained over 5,000 workers to date in a variety of needed construction skills. In addition to helping with trainee recruitment, the initiative has also been reaching out to local contractors to assist with job placement. State agencies in Louisiana and Mississippi report an average job placement rate of 80% for training graduates.

Construction training courses, funded by federal and state training grants, are conducted at local community and technical colleges. To ensure that training credentials are transportable, the initiative has been working in partnership with the National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCCER) to deploy training materials and provide nationally recognized completion certifications for the training graduates. NCCER training certification enables graduates to begin the process of building a rewarding career in the construction industry by incrementally adding certifications as the graduates expand their skills.

To help attract people to the construction training classes, the initiative has developed the **Gulf Rebuild: Education, Advancement & Training – GREAT** – marketing campaign, which seeks to associate participation in the gulf coast reconstruction with a personal sense of self worth and accomplishment. The Initiative maintains a website (www.imgreat.org) with information about the Initiative and how to sign up for training. Interested persons are directed to call the initiative's 24-7 toll-free call center (1-888-52-GREAT) for detailed information and assistance in signing up for classes. The initiative's marketing has included print ads, billboards, job fairs, community events and radio advertisements.

The training and career opportunities provided by the initiative have positively impacted the lives of many Gulf Coast residents. Construction training graduate Shawn D. states:

"Before starting training ... I was unemployed and was having a hard time finding a good job. I completed training in a short time; I didn't have to stay in school half my life to start a good career. I attended a job fair at the school and found a job I'm also currently attending welding training at night ... and still have time to spend with my family. It really is true that you can get started in a good job with a little training and continue move up in the construction field. I've referred family members and friends to this program; I want them to have a chance to make a good living too."

While much remains to be done in restoring the economic and cultural vitality of the gulf coast, the Gulf Coast Workforce Development Initiative represents a major step forward in the recovery process.