



## First Willets workers graduate assistance program

**BY PETE DAVIS**

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Fourteen Willets Point workers have a new set of skills that may help them land better and more lucrative jobs.

The workers recently graduated a 16-week program, developed by LaGuardia Community College, the city's Economic Development Corporation, the **Department of Small Business Services** and Greater New York Automobile Dealers Association (GNYADA), that gave them the opportunity to further their interest in automobiles, to a start in the franchised new vehicle industry.

"By graduating here today you have shown an aptitude and determination that will put you at a strong position to begin a career in the auto industry," said Mark Schienberg, President of the GNYADA, during the graduation ceremony on Thursday, June 17.

Although the city has not chosen a developer for the project and a number of businesses and property owners are holdouts at the site, the program with the GNYADA was designed to arm workers with the skills needed to compete for jobs in the highly-technical industry.

"The graduation of the first cohort offers every indication that these workers are now better prepared to obtain more advanced, higher-paying positions in the future," said New York City Economic Development Corporation (NYCEDC) president Seth Pinsky.

The city's plan to redevelop Willets Point won approval from the City Council back in November of 2008. The \$3 billion project, which Mayor Michael Bloomberg has made a centerpiece of his second-term agenda, would bring 1.7 million square feet of retail shops and restaurants, 500,000 square feet of office space, 5,500 units of housing, a hotel, a school and a convention center to a site described by many as blighted and an eyesore.

"We know how to work; we know how to change parts, but going to the program makes you know how to do it the right way," said Carlos Canal, who graduated from the program and has been working in auto body shops at Willets Point for nearly 10 years.

Canal said that hearing about the different programs with hybrid vehicles and the new technology were originally what attracted him to the program, but it taught him much more.

"Even if you want to apply with the dealer to get a job, they train you," said Carlos Canal said. "If you are going to an interview they work with you on the questions they are going to ask you and tell you how to dress."