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City giving Sandy victims leg up in finding construction jobs

By: Paula Katinas



The city is stepping up its efforts to help Superstorm Sandy victims get back on their feet. The New York City Dept. of Small Business Services (SBS), the Mayor's Office of Housing Recovery and Councilmember Mark Treyger announced the creation of a new program in which vouchers for free pre-apprenticeship training spots in the

construction industry will be made available to low and middle income residents of Sandy-impacted neighborhoods.

One hundred vouchers are being made available through the Sandy Recovery Workforce 1 Career Center, a program that helps storm victims find jobs, according to officials, who made the announcement Thursday in Coney Island.

The training programs are important because they can provide successful candidates with the opportunity for direct entry into union-sponsored construction apprenticeships, officials said. The voucher program can open the door to giving residents "access to some of the best jobs in New York City; union construction jobs," said Amy Peterson, director of Office of Housing Recovery.

The goal of the voucher program is to assist residents in getting jobs at construction sites in Sandy-impacted areas so that they can help rebuild their own communities, according to SBS Commissioner Maria Torres-Springer. "We must make sure Sandy-impacted communities are part of the recovery effort," she said.

Coney Island is one of the city neighborhoods hit hardest by Sandy in 2012. Many buildings were heavily damaged by the storm and are still in the process of being rebuilt, officials said.

Torres-Springer, Peterson and Treyger announced the voucher program at a Sandy job information fair sponsored by SBS and the city's Build It Back program that took place at the Coney Island Library at 1901 Mermaid Ave.

The fair, which took place in a second floor conference room at the library, brought together job seekers and representatives of programs that provide pre-apprentice training, including NYC District Council of Carpenters Building Works, the Edward J. Malloy Initiative for Construction Skills, New York City Helmets to Hardhats and Nontraditional Employment or Women.

The room was packed with people looking for jobs. Every available seat was taken, a testament to the strong desire Coney Island residents have to find work.

Alpha Sesay, who is looking for work as a carpenter, said he was glad he came to the fair. "I believe it will help me," he told the Brooklyn Eagle. "I have some carpentry skills but I would like to get into a good training program."

Keith Suber was there to look for prospective employees. Suber, owner of 911 Homesavers LLC, a construction company, said the voucher program will help job seekers get the training they need so that they can find employment. "People want good paying jobs," he told the Eagle. Suber, who lives in Coney Island, said he wants to help rebuild his community.

Helping residents in Sandy impacted neighborhoods find jobs is an important part of the storm recovery process, according to Susannah Dyen, organizer/policy analyst for Align: The Alliance for a Greater New York, an organization that works to ensure that the city is addressing the long-term needs of Sandy victims. "True recover isn't just about rebuilding buildings. It's about rebuilding lives," she told the Eagle.

Prior to attending the job information fair, Torres-Springer, Peterson and Treyger (D-Coney Island-Gravesend-Bensonhurst) took a tour of the Sandy Recovery Workforce 1 Career Center located across the street from the library, at 1906 Mermaid Ave.

The SBS-operated center, located on the second floor of a dental office, has been open since March and has helped 500 clients to date, according to Program Manager Stephen J. Anderson. Clients can receive assistance writing their resume and can get tips on how to ace a job interview. The center has private offices where clients can speak one-on-one to career counselors. Consultations were taking place as the city officials were taking their tour.

Treyger said he was pleased that the career center is located on Mermaid Avenue, Coney Island's main commercial thoroughfare. "This is the main shopping street in Coney Island. It's important for people to know that Coney Island is more than just the summer-time amusements. Real people live here," he told Eagle.