

CABINETMAKER PILOTS CITY-FUNDED JOBS PROGRAM

by Bret Nolan Collazzi (BRONX TIMES REPORTER) OCTOBER 11, 2007

When he took a job at Hendrickson Custom Cabinetry in Mott Haven in early 2006, Brandon Taylor had never built a single cabinet, let alone a high-end product sold to elite clients in Manhattan and the Hamptons.



"I was at a point where I had to decide what I wanted to do for a career," said the University Avenue resident, now 26, who had dabbled in woodworking and said he enjoyed it. "It turns out I found something I want to do for the rest of my life."

Soon, Taylor will get a chance to better explore his newfound love, thanks to an innovative city-funded anti-poverty program that provides grants to small businesses willing to teach their workers new skills and then raise wages accordingly.

Mayor Michael Bloomberg joined Hendrickson's owners and staff at the St. Ann's Avenue factory on Thursday, October 4, to announce the first five recipients of \$4.2 million in what are known as NYC Business Solutions Training Funds.

Hendrickson, which opened three and a half years ago in place of Philippe Besnard Inc., was awarded \$736,000 to train five employees, including Taylor, to use more advanced machines and adapt to modern design software.

Like all grant recipients, the firm will at least match the public funds with its own investment and submit to regular review by the Department of Small Business Services. Workers can expect their salaries to increase from under \$25,000 to the \$30,000-to-\$50,000 range.

The grants, an element of the mayor's year-old commitment to scale back poverty by testing innovative techniques, are distinct in two ways, Small Businesses Commissioner Robert Walsh said.

First, they allow firms to train workers to their own specifications; past programs set up job-training centers at which businesses recruited from a general pool. Second, by helping existing workers win promotions, they open up entry-level jobs for the unemployed.

"We used to go to businesses and say, 'Hire New Yorkers' — it sounded like a Save My Children ad," Walsh said. "Now we can go to businesses and say, 'What do you need? We'll work with you.' And now we're finally getting people who were in lower wages to higher wages, which is something we've never done."

For the Bronx cabinetry shop, run by husband and wife Felix and Lisa Hendrickson, the program is a win-win. Because the firm would need to train workers anyway before it could expand, it can now do so more quickly and cheaply, giving it an advantage in the marketplace.

It also helps ensure that loyal, appreciated workers will have more chances to advance their careers — a goal Lisa Hendrickson said her company has been committed to from the start.

“When someone comes to work at Hendrickson Custom Cabinetry, we understand they’re looking for a career,” she said. “So if the employee has a commitment to build the company, we have the commitment to build the employee.”

The deadline for the next round of NYC Business Solutions Training Grants — worth \$1 million — is Monday, October 15. Small businesses interested in submitting a pre-application should call 311 or visit www.nyc.gov/sbs.