

Oakland training people for green-tech jobs

Christopher Heredia, Chronicle Staff Writer

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Oakland officials kicked off a new training program Monday to turn underemployed workers into qualified candidates for jobs in the budding green-technology field.

A dozen construction apprentices who are part of the Oakland Green Jobs Corps attended a ceremony before they demonstrated solar panel installation at a West Oakland warehouse that has been their classroom for the past four months.

U.S. Rep. Barbara Lee, D-Oakland, and Mayor Ron Dellums were among the dignitaries to commend the green-jobs trainees and commit to making the training program a national model.

The job corps is a \$750,000 collaboration between Laney College, the Cypress Mandela Training Center and Growth Sector Inc., a workforce development consultant in San Francisco.

The city of Oakland provided \$250,000 for the program. Private companies and trade unions have also supported the effort, which will lead to 40 paid trainees securing jobs in green construction, energy efficiency and solar panel installation.

Leaders of the effort billed it as "green pathways out of poverty" because many of the participants come from poor backgrounds or were formerly in prison.

"This is an extraordinary effort ... that is elegant in its simplicity and embrace: You can fight pollution and poverty simultaneously," Dellums said, speaking to the trainees. "You are the trailblazers."

Lee vowed to get a bill to expand the Green Jobs Corps nationwide through Congress and onto the next president's desk. She said the bill would help cities such as Oakland, which face high unemployment, staggering school dropout rates and serious crime problems.

"We want the federal government to buy into what is happening in Oakland," Lee said, adding that her bill calls for establishing green grants, a green institute and alternative green academies to 10 cities.

Olivia Caldwell, a 27-year-old single mother from Oakland, said the Green Jobs Corps has given her a chance at a fresh start. Briefly imprisoned for petty theft, Caldwell said the program - where trainees learned the basics of construction, financial management and received



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help toward earning their diplomas - gave her a sense of purpose.

She hopes she can become a role model for her family and community.

"It's not for me, but for my daughter that I do this," said Caldwell who is looking forward to a job that pays \$20 an hour after finishing training in four months. "I don't want to leave the world in disarray."

So far, five Bay Area companies have agreed to hire graduates from the program, officials said.

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