

## Riverbay Corporation benefits from collaboration with local non-profit to hire dislocated workers

**BY ROZAAN BOONE**

Riverbay's participation in a New York City jobs program is resulting in qualified new hires at significant savings to the corporation.

BronxWorks, the local non-profit organization that Riverbay has partnered with, has been in existence for over 40 years providing senior services, after-school and summer camp programs, employment assistance, HIV/AIDS services, immigration assistance, eviction prevention, homeless services, benefits assistance and much more. BronxWorks is an affiliate of Seedco, a national non-profit organization committed to helping low-income individuals and communities move towards economic prosperity.

Through BronxWorks' Workforce Development Department, New York area businesses are connected with qualified jobseekers at no cost.

"Riverbay's commitment to employing

community residents and offering them high quality, highly competitive jobs is reminiscent of how employers used to be," said Kedon Wilson, Program Coordinator, Dislocated Worker Program, BronxWorks. "Riverbay, a bastion within the community, firmly adheres to the belief that investing in the community is the responsibility of any area business; their hiring practices complement their words, pumping life into a distressed neighborhood, despite the hardships that come with today's economy."

Riverbay's Director of Human Resources, Colette Ragin, said: "As a good corporate citizen, Riverbay has partnered with BronxWorks to provide employment opportunities and experience to displaced workers in the job force. This program is an excellent tool to reposition people in the labor market so as to reduce

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# Jobs program

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structural unemployment. It offers a win-win solution for job-seekers and employers.”

For providing employment opportunities, Riverbay is reimbursed 75% for 3 months of employment and 100% if the employees are kept on for 6 months.

So far, Riverbay has received about \$18,000 for the 10 employees, all Bronx residents, who were hired through BronxWorks’ Dislocated Worker Program.

Citing confidentiality reasons, Seedco could not disclose whether all or partial funding for the dislocated workers program at BronxWorks comes from the federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) or the wage subsidy program whose primary focus is to help put the unemployed and those in cash assistance programs back to work.

The federal wage subsidy program, which is part of the Obama administration’s American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, was allocated \$5 billion that states can tap into to subsidize jobs, reimburse states for the increased costs associated with rising welfare caseloads and provide short-term aid to the poor. Many states have utilized the funding to place workers in part-time and full-time positions with private companies, such as the Riverbay Corporation, and at nonprofit groups and government agencies. So far, it is estimated that some 243,730 jobs have been created nationwide.

“Our collaboration with BronxWorks has not only been giving unemployed individuals an opportunity to get work experience, but it also benefits us because we’re reimbursed for their salaries,” said Shona Pinnock, Riverbay’s Human Resources Employee Relations Manager. “Along the way, we’ve had some success stories where folks who began working in these temporary spots have been able to secure permanent positions within the Riverbay Corporation based on their qualifications and work performance.”

Rebecca Adorno, who was hired by Riverbay six months ago through the employment program at BronxWorks, said that she had been out of work since leaving Pennsylvania in February, 2009 and moving to the Bronx, N.Y. with her two young children. After qualifying for a position at Riverbay, she was placed in the Human Resources Department where her experience as a clerical assistant/receptionist proved valuable. In her position for the past six months as an HR assistant, she has been responsible for a variety of clerical duties including answering and screening incoming calls; receiving visitors to the HR Department; sending our correspondence; creating new employee files; and assisting the Employment Manager in the new hire process, among other duties.

In addition, Rebecca has filled in or

temped in a number of other departments at Riverbay, including the Parking Facilities Department, the Executive Office, Buildings & Grounds and even working on the weekends as a restroom valet.

“I’ve been taking the time and moving around quite a bit to become familiar with the community,” said Rebecca.

Rebecca’s dedication to doing the best job possible and her work ethic have paid off because recently, she applied for, interviewed and was selected as one of five applicants for an open lobby attendant position, which she will start on Wednesday.

“Riverbay Corporation really lives up to their values of putting people first and trusting in one another,” said Rebecca. “Especially during the recent work stoppage, I saw everyone, regardless of their rank or stature within the company, doing whatever they can to help.”

In addition to Rebecca, one other employee hired through BronxWorks has also been hired full-time and eight others have been placed throughout departments at the Riverbay Corporation. Pinnock said that she has been getting rave reviews from their respective supervisors about their job performance.

“I’m always getting good feedback so we’re getting quality work from quality applicants,” said Pinnock. “I think we’ve gotten a good yield from this program because we have been able to hire quality

people and help them change their situations. Some had been living in shelters before and now have gotten apartments and become self sufficient.”

Ragin noted that through its partnership with BronxWorks, Riverbay is able to offset labor costs and benefit from having a qualified employee. “It encourages those at risk to stay in the labor force,” she said. “It is also important to note that these positions will not result in the displacement of existing employees here at Riverbay.”

Ragin further stated that this partnership is an example of how Riverbay Corporation embraces its Guiding Principles—put people first, trust in teamwork, focus on excellence, and always being accountable.

As unemployment rates continue to climb nationwide and in New York, Bronx County continues to be hardest hit in the New York City area.

In April 2010, the unemployment rate in Bronx County was 12.5%, which is 50% higher than the New York metropolitan area rate of 8.8%. The Bronx unemployment rate was 33% higher than the rate for New York City, which was 9.4%.

Over the past year, the unemployment rate in the Bronx increased from 10.5% in April, 2009 to 12.5% in April, 2010, remaining the highest for any borough in New York City.