

SBS IN THE NEWS

THE HUNTS POINT *Express*

Fall 2008

Serving Hunts Point and Longwood

Bloomberg comes to Hunts Point to promise job

By Joe Hirsch
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With the city facing its worst economic crisis in decades, Mayor Michael Bloomberg visited Hunts Point, hoping to bring some encouraging news for nervous job seekers.

The mayor and other city officials told reporters and staff members of the Workforce1 Career Center on East 163rd Street that the program—which has seven offices spread out across the five boroughs, including two in the Bronx—is on track to break last year's record of 17,000 job placements, despite the present economic downturn.

Bronx resident Raul Figueroa, flanked by Mayor Bloomberg and Deputy Mayor for Economic Development Robert C. Leiber, tells the public about the Hunts Point job service that helped him land work.



Photo by Joe Hirsch

To augment the agency's services, Bloomberg announced the centers will now remain open until 8 p.m. on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, and will open on alternate Saturdays between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m., thanks to a \$4 ¼ million grant from the state.

The goal of the new center is to place 2,250 Bronx residents in jobs within three years.

Workforce1 centers, which were introduced in 2004, provide job seekers with vocational training, resume writing advice, career counseling and GED and ESL classes, along with other skill building techniques designed to help jobless residents find employment.

"We are in very perilous times, and many New Yorkers are counting on our help," Bloomberg said on his Dec. 1 visit, adding that his administration is directing city agencies to "find innovative and low-cost ways to help New Yorkers."

The Hunts Point office, which opened in August, has so far seen 800 applicants and found work for 125 jobs of them, according to the center's director, Alex Gomez. Most of the jobs have been in security or for home health care aides, said Gomez. Wages for the jobs available through the service are slightly above the minimum wage.

Creating a job center was originally proposed in the Hunts Point Vision Plan, devised by the mayor's office and local community organizations in 2003. Last year, the city closed its first effort

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at creating an employment agency, Hunts Point Works.

Of the new office on 163rd Street, Bloomberg said businesses benefit because they don't pay for the service, and they establish trusting relationships with the local job center and the employees who are trained to work for them.

The Mayor said the fiscal crisis will eventually subside, but that until then New York residents must be realistic in weathering the storm.

"We love the financial industry, want them to make a lot of money, pay a lot of taxes," the Mayor said, explaining how the downturn on Wall Street has affected the city's finances. "But when they're not, we have to have a fallback."

In addition to announcing the new hours for the Workforce1 site, the Mayor and other officials announced that the newly formed Southern Boulevard Business Improvement District will work with 138 businesses along Southern Boulevard, to help promote local businesses.

"BIDs bring commerce down to the local level," the Mayor said.

"The public is on a buyer's strike," the Mayor continued, pointing out that New Yorkers are choosing to spend less money as a result of the downturn, and that initiatives like Workforce1 and the BID will help.

Some Bronx residents have already benefited from the center.

"I came here one day, looking for a job," said Raul Figueroa, a 24 year-old Bronx resident who has been working as a salesman at a wireless service center on Southern Boulevard, thanks to Workforce1. "Once I walked into this room, everybody greeted me like they knew me for years," he said.

Figueroa said he attended an interview workshop, then "I went out one Friday to my interview and I got the job that same day."

Figueroa thinks it would have been difficult finding the job without the outside help, adding, "They helped me fix my resume, because it was a mess."