

SBS IN THE NEWS



New EMT Program Gives Students Hope LaGuardia CC offers hands-on healthcare training at Workforce 1

By Tammy Scileppi
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The cloud of rising unemployment has a silver lining, and hope was evident in the faces of students getting hands-on EMT training at a new healthcare career center at LaGuardia Community College last week.

The center, called Workforce 1, opened on Oct. 26 and is meant to give the city's unemployed a leg up by connecting them to training and employment help in the healthcare industry – one of the few industries that has continued to grow in the recession.

Through the Workforce 1 center, the college will offer eight stimulus-funded classes meant to train participants for a range of healthcare occupations. Those who complete the program could become patient care technicians, emergency medical technicians, paramedics, licensed practical nurses or registered nurses, among other things.

The idea is to “re-conceptualize how we do economic development for the city,” said LaGuardia President Gail Mellow.

“The mayor has challenged us with an ambitious goal to connect more New Yorkers with jobs, especially during these difficult times,” said Small Business Services Commissioner Robert Walsh. With that in mind, Workforce 1 staff offers training that reflects employer demand.

In addition to training, students will receive career counseling, Mellow said, adding that five Workforce 1 participants have already found jobs.

More than 750 New Yorkers who complete the Workforce 1 program in the next two years are expected to land jobs or receive promotions in the healthcare industry, LaGuardia officials said.

LaGuardia is billing the career center as a “saving grace” for New Yorkers who wish to pursue careers in the medical profession. And some of the participants who signed up to train there seem to have similar thoughts.

Cynthia Rivera of Flushing was laid off from her job at an agency that recruits nurses. A single mother, she “wanted to do something that was recession-proof.” She hopes the training she receives at Workforce 1 will enable her to become a paramedic or an emergency room technician.

Desmin James, an undergraduate student who took pre-med and math at Duke University, enrolled in the EMT training to get practical experience. “You get free equipment, books, uniforms ... and after a couple of months, you can assist EMTs in the field,” James said.

After six months at Workforce 1, students can receive EMT certification and seek jobs.

The career center – one of several citywide – is receiving \$2.5 million in federal stimulus money.

Since the centers began opening five years ago, more than 80,000 trainees, or about 91 percent of those who participate, have found jobs – perhaps not surprising, given how fast the healthcare industry is growing.

The city has seen an increase of 13,800 healthcare jobs between 2008 and 2009, and 3 million new jobs are expected to be created in the next 10 years.

Continued employment in the field is anticipated due in part to an aging population, with jobs in home healthcare, nursing and residential care rapidly increasing.

“Despite the national economic downturn, which continues to make for trying times for many New Yorkers, our efforts to place people in jobs are paying off in record numbers,” said Mayor Mike Bloomberg. “Eight years ago, the city’s workforce centers were placing New Yorkers in roughly 500 jobs a year. This year, we placed them in

more than 6,800 – just in the last three months – up nearly 60 percent from 2008, after a record high 17,000 job placements in 2008.

“We have a lot of work still to do to bounce back from the national recession,” the mayor continued, “but the 20,000 New Yorkers we’ll place in jobs this year demonstrate that by being proactive, we can make real difference in people’s lives.”

The Workforce 1 center is located at 30-20 Thomson Ave. in Long Island City.