

Two Women On the Weatherization Path to Green-Collar Careers

As told to Alexis Greene, Community Environmental Center
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The expansion of the Weatherization Assistance Program under the Recovery Act means many more workers can be hired and trained for its “green-collar” jobs retrofitting America’s homes. The local Weatherization programs and contractors are committed to providing good jobs at family-supporting wages for many newly employed skilled technicians. These jobs are suited to a diverse group of workers and cannot be exported.



Two of Weatherization’s new hires tell their story here:

Ruby Carrasquillo, Weatherization Crew Mechanic, Queens, New York

Ruby had worked in sales most of her life, but several years ago she felt that “nothing seemed to be working out. I didn’t see a career.” Just when she was “down and out” following a serious operation and her mother’s death, her aunt brought her a flyer from Nontraditional Employment for Women (NEW).

Ruby had some experience fixing up apartments – putting up sheet rock, stripping floors – but never as a regular nine-to-five job. But she said, ‘You know what? I’m going to do this.’” She took NEW’s entrance exam, was admitted to their six-week training program and graduated in March 2009 at 46.

As of the fall of 2009, she belongs to the Laborers’ International Union of North America (LIUNA) and works as a Crew Mechanic for Community Environmental Center (CEC), a non-profit organization that weatherizes low-income homes and apartment buildings in New York City using US Department of Energy funding

from the American Re-investment and Recovery Act and other sources. .

“When CEC trained us about weatherization,” says Ruby, “I thought, ‘Wow, this is cool.’ There’s a routine – you may use the same tools – but for different things. No two houses are the same. And weatherization saves lives.”

On the job, Ruby injects cellulose insulation into walls and puts weather stripping around doors and windows.

“... five years ago CEC added a women’s locker room to its facilities – but due to the lack of women employees never used it. With the LIUNA partnership and growth of weatherization investment, they’re using it for the first time.”

**U.S. Labor Secretary Hilda Solis,
Orlando, Florida, Sep, 16, 2009**

“What really caught me during the training was when one of the guys took a block of cellulose insulation, put a penny on it and then turned on a torch. That’s like 480 degrees. The penny evaporated – turned to liquid. The insulation did not burn.”

Ruby relishes the hands-on aspects of her green-collar job and values the purpose and the beneficial results of Weatherization. “It saves on the cost of gas, the cost of electricity. If your house is not insulated, in the summer you constantly have to have the air conditioner on, because the house leaks air. With insulation, you stay cooler in summer, warmer in winter.”

Ruby intends to continue Weatherizing and plans to move up, perhaps to Crew Chief. And being in so-called ‘nontraditional’ work never daunts her. “This is a great job for a woman,” she insists. “Every day I accomplish something. Men may have a little more muscle than us. Where it takes two men to pick something up, it may take four women. But there’s nothing women can’t do. God created us all equal.”



Tahlia Williams, Weatherization Crew Mechanic, Queens, New York

Tahlia was born in South Carolina and came to New York City when she was 13, to live with her mother who owned a brownstone and rented apartments; Tahlia learned to help her with repairs.

Tahlia began her career at a daycare center with the Department of Mental Health. “This is not for me,” she often felt. She was a single parent with a

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young son and needed a job that would give her solid skills and reliable benefits.

Once her mother brought a newsletter from Nontraditional Employment for Women (NEW), Tahlia was soon enrolled in NEW’s six-week training course. After graduating, she was hired in the offices of the Laborers’ International Union of North America (LIUNA) and then was chosen for the specialized Weatherization training.

Now 30, Tahlia is working as a Crew Mechanic for Community Environmental Center (CEC), a nonprofit organization that weatherizes low-income homes and apartment buildings in New York City using US Department of Energy funding from the American Re-investment and Recovery Act and other sources.

Tahlia arrives for work at 7:30 a.m., and she and the rest of the crew equip the trucks with the tools and materials they will need when at the work sites.

She loves the work. “I’m learning different things every day,” says Tahlia. “From side-wall drilling to blowing insulation into walls to going into attic crawl spaces. I’m learning about boilers. It’s really interesting how houses are made; it’s good to learn the things we can do to preserve them.” Her favorite task: installing airtight windows. “I like the measuring, and I like figuring out how to put the windows in,” she says.

She wishes that she could bring James to work, but there can be a lot of dust at a work site. “I would love him to see what I do,” says Tahlia, “because he does ask me, ‘Mommy, you goin’ to work? I have to go to school.’”

The crew finishes around 4 p.m. It is a long day, but usually she can pick up her three-year-old, James, from daycare herself. In fact, one of the reasons Tahlia likes her green job is that she

sets a good example for her boy. “With me working in the construction business,” she says, “that’s something I can pass down to him. It’s definitely a good job for a woman!”