



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

James Skoufis

Innovative Pre-Apprenticeship Program Paves Way for Diverse Union Ranks

JAMES SKOUFIS August 24, 2021

| ISSUE: **2019-2020 BUDGET, APPRENTICESHIPS, LABOR, CONSTRUCTION, UNIONS**



Senator James Skoufis (D-Hudson Valley) applauded graduates from the “BUILDnBEYOND HV” building trades pre-apprenticeship program in an August 12 ceremony at the Newburgh headquarters of Laborers' Local 17. The seven graduates from Newburgh, New Windsor, Walden, Pine Bush, and Middletown ranged in age from 18 to 30 and represented the first of many cohorts to complete this innovative, hands-on training program.

Designed to create direct pathways to good-paying, steady union jobs for historically underrepresented communities, BUILDnBEYOND HV recruits young and early-career women and minority candidates to complete over 160 hours of instruction as pre-apprentices, setting them up for automatic entry into full-fledged apprenticeships in the building trades. Through hands-on learning, site visits, and classroom instruction, pre-apprentices tackle labor history, industry skill-building, personal finance, tools/materials, and specialized coursework such as OSHA-10, CPR/First Aid, construction math, excavator safety, and more.

During 2019 state budget negotiations, Senator Skoufis--the son of a union member himself--discovered other regions of the state were being awarded funding to create union pre-apprenticeship programs. Skoufis facilitated development of BUILDnBEYOND HV, which is fully funded for another two class years and is expected to remain permanently funded by the state. By eliminating barriers to entry for communities that have historically been absent from the union trades, Skoufis and union leaders hope to establish a direct pipeline which allows young residents from the greater Newburgh area to learn new skills, create financial stability for their families, and develop a lifelong professional support system. Union leadership is thrilled to bring a variety of backgrounds and lived experiences to their professional community and to meaningfully expand their ranks as demand for labor grows.

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“For the uninitiated, the process of joining a construction trade union can be daunting,” said Senator Skoufis. “The terminology, the procedures, the paperwork, the tools of the trade... they’re all enough to make your head spin. I am so proud of the work these dedicated pre-apprentices have done to pave the way for future cohorts and grateful to our Hudson Valley building trades for their partnership on this. This program is a vital initiative for increasing generational opportunity in and around Newburgh and I am proud to continue going to bat

for it.”

“We’re honored to take part in shaping the future of labor here in the Hudson Valley,” noted **Hudson Valley Building Trades Council President Todd Diorio**. “With the current local building boom and all of the federal infrastructure projects expected in coming years, there’s no better time for area youth to get involved. Congratulations to all of our pre-apprentices and a major thanks to Senator Skoufis for bringing this program to fruition!”

“I am thankful for the funding that helped start this program and ecstatic to be a part of it,” added **BUILDnBEYOND HV Director Jeff Beck**, a union construction laborer. “After graduating college I intended to become a teacher, but was inspired to join the trades because of a family member. Finding myself back in the realm of teaching eight years later, and helping people start new and exciting professional lives in the process, is an extremely rewarding opportunity.”

"I honestly wish I had known about this program when I was in school years ago," said **pre-apprenticeship graduate Raymond Russell**. "This pre-apprenticeship really opened my, and my classmates', eyes—not only to earning potential and a great career, but also good people and great learning experiences. I had my first son at an early age, so the 'school' part of life was hard to do at that time while working and caring for him. This opportunity would have really helped me out then, but I'm taking full advantage of it now and it's the most noble thing. It really changed my life and opened so many doors for me that I thought were closed. I want to thank everyone who had a part in making all this happen: Senator Skoufis, my instructors, Todd Diorio, and the board members and union guys for giving us options."

The class of 2021 included **Ruben Ayala** (Middletown), **Javier Bravo** (Pine Bush), **Caroline Krzeminski** (Walden), **Omar Martinez** (Newburgh), **Francisco Ramirez** (New Windsor), **Raymond Russell**

(New Windsor), and **Cameron Williams** (New Windsor). While accepting their completion certificates, graduates chose their preferred apprenticeship path with either Laborers' Local 17, Carpenters' Local 279, Electrical Workers' Local 363, or Operating Engineers' Local 825. Five of the seven graduates opted for immediate apprenticeship enrollment, and two plan to initiate their apprenticeships this winter.

BUILDnBEYOND HV plans to host its next pre-apprenticeship class in Spring 2022. Those interested in learning more should visit BUILDnBEYONDHV.com. To apply, contact Director Jeff Beck for details at jbeck110@gmail.com.