

June 4, 2009

## Overview of MoDOT and PCC Efforts to Diversify Construction Workforce



As part of the ongoing commitment to increase the number of minority, female and economically disadvantaged individuals working in the construction industry, the Missouri Department of Transportation and Paseo Corridor Constructors (PCC) have thus far achieved the following:

- Dedicated up to \$1.25 million for training programs and incentives to increase the number of minorities, females and economically disadvantaged individuals working on the project.
- Initiated an on-the-job training (OJT) program that currently includes four individuals working in professional services (with three more in the approval process) and 21 individuals working in construction (including those working for PCC subcontractors). PCC is working toward the goal of doubling the number of construction force OJTs in early 2009. **See following pages for profiles on four current construction OJTs.**
- Awarded \$29.5 million in contracts to Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) firms. This represents 12.7 percent of the \$232 million contract with the DBE goal established at 13 percent.
- Established contracts with various DBE firms representing a cross-section of construction industry expertise. Companies currently participating on the kcicon Project include the following:

All Pro Construction, Inc.

BSC Steel, Inc.

Burton & Associates

Chism & Sons Trucking

Erosion Control, Inc.

KC Consulting

Malco Construction, Inc.

Midwest Contracting Services, Inc.

Millhouse Engineering

Realm Construction, Inc.

Rodriguez Mechanical Contractors

Schrimpf Landscaping, Inc.

TapanAM Associates, Inc.

TSI

Trekk Design Group, LLC

Although these efforts represent a good start, they are just that – a start. Construction activities will remain in full force even as design work comes to a close in the coming months, and efforts will continue to increase the number of labor OJTs and certified DBE subcontractors working on the project.

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# Profiles of kcICON Project On-the-Job Trainees

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Although he's just starting down the career path toward journeyman status, **Gregory Preston, Jr.** already possesses an important trait for success in the working world – a thirst for knowledge.

As a laborer apprentice working with Paseo Corridor Constructor's river bridge crew, Preston has already learned some things about crane signals, flagging, checking for overhead hazards near crane operations and how to hold a jackhammer. But that's just the start of what he wants to do.

"I'd like to do welding, carpentry – everything really. I'm trying to learn as much as I can so I'm useful," Preston said, adding that he's learning something new every day.

Although he had some experience with remodeling houses, Preston had no heavy construction background when he followed his cousin's advice and signed up with the Laborer's Local #663 in early October. The next day he was assigned to the kcICON Project, and was soon walking across steel I-beams in the middle of the Missouri River measuring the ground level for the center pylon shafts.

In addition to the 3,200 working hours required to finish the apprenticeship program, Preston is putting in the 164 hours of requisite classroom work. Having already finished the program's orientation class, he plans to take the second course in January and eventually study everything from environmental regulations to workplace safety standards.

For now, though, he enjoys the day-to-day contributions he is making toward building Kansas City's newest iconic river crossing.

"I love wearing a hard hat. You feel like you're really doing something," Preston said, adding, "I can't wait until the bridge is done and I can bring my (3) kids down here and say 'I helped build that.'"



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**John Vaca** knew he was looking for more financial stability for his family when he signed up with Laborer's Local #663, but he was unsure what else a career in construction would offer.

A former warehouse manager, Vaca has a brother-in-law with an asphalt paving company and a cousin who works for Comanche Construction, Inc., but he himself had very little construction experience and no background at all in heavy highway construction when Paseo Corridor Constructors came calling.

"The work here is not as intense as I assumed it to be. They (supervisors) are very patient and understanding and they take their time to show me the right way to do things," Vaca said.

Tasks he's done on the kcICON Project thus far include operating power tools like saws and pneumatic wrenches, setting up concrete barriers along the roadway, vegetation and site clearing, and grade checking – the last of which he has enjoyed most thus far. As someone who "loves to crunch numbers," Vaca said the calculations involved with making sure the elevations of the ground coincides with the project plans makes this the most interesting part of the job.

Other aspects of the work he takes pleasure in are the steady pay and the health insurance benefits. And as a husband and father of three children (with a fourth on the way), Vaca encourages other people looking for professional advancement to consider these factors.



“It’s not as bad working out here as some people might think. I was looking for something better in the long-term for my family and have found this to be a great opportunity to provide for them,” he said.

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Helping chip away sections of I-29/35 bridges that have stood in place for more than 50 years might seem like hard work to some, but hard work isn’t something **Jerome Spires** shies away from.

“I like hard work. When you’re on your feet working hard the days go by quicker. There are some days when lunch time comes that it seems like we just got here,” Spires said.

As a member of the Paseo Corridor Constructors grading crew, Spires has helped with flagging duties, removed formwork after concrete pours and operated a jackhammer to remove sections of the railroad viaduct bridge just south of the Front Street interchange.



With a brother-in-law and father who are cement masons, Spires said he had helped build driveways before, but hadn’t done anything like the work he’s doing on the kcICON Project.

Like most of the on-the-job trainees on this project, Spires is just beginning the three-year process toward journeyman status, but he can already see what the future holds by looking toward his co-workers.

“We have crew members who have been through the apprenticeship program so they know what I’m going through,” he said. “My goal is to learn as much as I can and grow so I can get to journeyman status and be at the top of the pay scale.”

With a strong work ethic and clear vision of where he wants to be someday, this father of two boys said success in the construction industry depends greatly on a person’s attitude.

“My advice to anyone going into a career in construction is to show them you’re all about business and that you’re serious about it. If you’re serious, they’ll see that and you’ll go a long way,” he said.