

Students See Ups, Downs of Construction

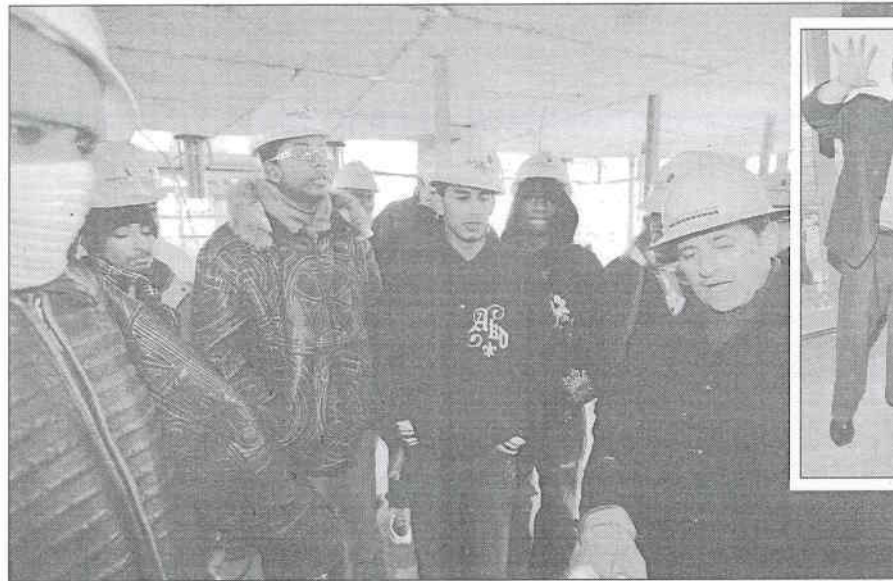
BY MATT DUNNING

Antonio Cardenas, 17, stood against the inner wall of a construction lift 29 stories above the street. His legs were stiff and locked at the knee, due in part to the icy 20-mile-per-hour winds and part to the dizzying height.

"I'm going to stick to the ground," said Cardenas, a student at the High School for Construction Trades, Engineering and Architecture in Queens, thinking about his future. "It's not that I'm afraid of heights, it's just better to be safe, I think."

Cardenas was touring Beekman Tower, the 76-story residential building under construction at Spruce and William Streets. Last month, he and several of his classmates got a behind-the-scenes look at several major Downtown projects, including 7 World Trade Center and the Dey Street concourse of the MTA's Fulton Street Transit Center, where they went 50 feet below the street into what is now a bare concrete corridor that will eventually connect the Transit Center to the World Trade Center Transportation Hub. The tour was courtesy of the Lower Manhattan Construction Command Center (LMCCC) and its program to interest women and minorities in construction fields.

"I thought it was pretty educational," junior Josh Chowtie said. "In the future, I want to be a construction manager, so this kind of trip prepares me. Now I



PHOTOS BY ALLAN TANNENBAUM

Students tour Beekman Tower (left) with Joseph Rechichi and 7 WTC (above) with Dara McQuillan of Silverstein Properties.

know what the business entails, so I'll know more than my peers going in, and I'll be on top."

"This is probably not a great time to be getting into investment banking," said the LMCCC's acting executive director Bob Harvey, "but it's certainly a great time to be getting into construction, design and engineering. I hope they get the feeling that they've made the right decision in terms of a career path, and that they stick with it and get excited about what lies ahead of them."

From their first stop, the Dey Street project—a marvel of engineering in which each of the two ends of the tunnel are constructed below a subway sta-

tion—the students made their way to the concrete skeleton of Forest City Ratner's mammoth 850-foot-tall Beekman Tower, now standing at 32 stories.

The students endured formidable winds that brought temperatures into the low teens while Forest City Ratner senior vice president Joseph Rechichi explained how thousands of tons of concrete are pumped up to the top of the building and molded to form each new floor.

"It's not easy to build a tall building in Lower Manhattan," Rechichi told the students. "When it works, it feels great."

Unfortunately, most of the students were too busy trying to stay warm to engage in a dialogue with Rechichi or

any of his foremen. Some students said they would have been eager to ask questions, were it not for the cold.

"I felt like the more questions I asked the longer we'd have to stay," junior Richard Benitez said once the group had moved to warmer environs for lunch at the LMCCC's headquarters. Benitez said the weather that day may have influenced his career path.

"I always played with Legos when I was young, and I loved building stuff, so originally I thought I wanted to do construction," he said. "But then I realized it's going to be mad cold on certain days. So I said forget that, I'll just design the house."