

Diversity and the boom

Program looks to add women, minorities to construction trades

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**BOROUGH OF MANHATTAN
COMMUNITY COLLEGE.** With \$22 billion worth of construction and 10,000 jobs expected to flood one square mile of Lower Manhattan in the coming years, the city and state are working to meet a "good faith" goal of a workforce where 20 percent are minorities and women.

To that end, the Lower Manhattan Construction Command Center — the city/state agency overseeing area construction — has partnered with the college and the Building Trades Employers' Association to develop a pilot program to diversify the construction trades.

According to Vincenza Restiano, director of the LMCCC's Opportunity Downtown program, the construction industry is expected to face a shortage of skilled labor, entry-level workers and management personnel during the coming surge. For example, a



Femi Agana, of Brooklyn, hopes the LMCCC's courses can help her start her own construction business. The LMCCC is working to line up entry-level work for students. "One of our students has already been hired to intern at Tishman," said Vincenza Restiano, director of the program.

2005 survey identified "job scheduler" as one of the top five construction administration positions employers have difficulty recruiting.

Last Monday, the LMCCC held a class called "construction project job scheduler training." The students — a

group of 16 adults, who hold various jobs — took notes about placing orders for cement or securing skilled workers. They examined flow charts to monitor thousands of tasks: Should installing gutters, Sheetrock and windows be done at the

same time or sequentially? Can the plumbing be done in one day?

Brooklynite Femi Agana — a union carpenter since 2000 and one-time "tradeswoman of the year" — hoped the class could help her realize her dream of owning her

Opportunity

The LMCCC's Opportunity Downtown program is planning to launch two other courses focusing on administrative jobs. For more information about the LMCCC's Opportunity Downtown program, call 212-481-3780.

own construction company. The former fashion designer said working in construction hasn't been easy.

"As a woman, you have to do more to prove yourself," she said. "You really have to use your wits besides the physical challenge."

Brooklyn City Councilwoman Letitia James has urged the Council to prioritize meeting with the construction industry to discuss minority participation.

"Even with the union's pre-apprenticeship program [to help minority workers], they get union cards, but they don't get union jobs because of the seniority system," she said.

"Obviously, we need to increase the number of people of color within the construction industry, from the bottom to the top. There are still some institutional issues we have to deal with in promoting and retaining minority workers, especially when there's so much public money going to so many projects."