



# Bulletin

Serving Professional Union Finishing Contractors in the Midwest

December 2009

## Women and Minorities Graduate From JATF With Help From Opportunity Alliance of Illinois

On October 29th, 2009 graduation ceremonies were held for 69 graduates of the Painters District Council No. 30 Joint Apprenticeship and Training Program. Among those graduates were three participants of Opportunity Alliance of Illinois (OA). OA was formed in June of 2008 when District Council No. 30's JATF received a grant from the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) under the Employment Opportunities Grant Program (EOGP). We know from a wealth of data and experience that individuals not traditionally employed in the construction trades face significant barriers to entry and successful completion of apprenticeship. The goal of the program is to expand the number of individual minorities and women entering and completing unionized apprenticeship training in the finishing trades.

On October 29th, the first OA participants graduated from the apprenticeship program to full journey-level status. Danniela Cruz, Marcus Mitchell and Rhonda Stramka were welcomed to the ranks of journey level workers. Danniela Cruz is a painter who works for Ascher Brothers Company, Marcus Mitchell is a painter who works for Continental Painting and Decorating, and Rhonda Stramka is a glazier with East Moline Glass Company. Although they were apprentices when the program began in 2008, part of the goals of the Opportunity Alliance program is to assist participants to not "fall through the cracks", especially during a time where the economy makes continuous employment difficult. Opportunity Alliance had the pleasure of working with these outstanding craftsmen, their employers, and others to identify

the challenges they were facing and address them with creative solutions and program support.

OA participants work with the Executive Director to draft an Individual Career Plan and OA provides customized assistance package tailored to each individual's situation, goals and needs.

Support through OA is designed to address basic needs, such as reliable transportation and childcare, that might otherwise hinder someone's ability to travel distances or arrive at work on time. The total support participants receive from OA, as well as the program partners, helps reduce the stress level of potential employees, making them more focused and safety conscious.

It is also helpful in retaining talented individuals who might otherwise leave the trade when work slows down.

The real success of graduation lies with the participants, as they have achieved the milestones required to reach journey level status in our trade. Ms. Cruz, Mr. Mitchell and Ms. Stramka are outstanding examples for others who wish to enter the finishing trades. Their employers also deserve positive recognition for ensuring that their work forces are diversifying by representing both women and minorities at a time when we all know that work opportunities are difficult to find. It is my great pleasure to wish these three participants, as well as the other recent graduates, much success as they move forward with their careers. ☼

Laura Berry, OA Executive Director, can be reached at (630) 450- 8451 or [laura@oailinois.org](mailto:laura@oailinois.org).

By **Laura Berry**  
Executive Director  
Opportunity Alliance of Illinois



**Success Stories Inside** →

# Opportunity Alliance Success Stories

## Six years ago, the world was a different place for Marcus Mitchell.

Wandering from one dead-end job to another, his life seemed to be out of control. Life can be tough when you're a convicted felon just out of prison. "I was going nowhere," he said. "I was just going in a circle. I was going from factory to factory. As a felon, you really can't get a decent job."

But Mitchell was determined to make it. Shortly after coming home from prison, he happened to attend a job fair. At the job fair, he came in contact with an organization called the Target Group. Six months later they called and asked if he wanted a job as a driver with a union painting company. Mitchell had already landed a job making four dollars an hour more. But the person on the phone explained to him that if he did well with this job he would have the opportunity to become a union painter. So Mitchell went to work for Continental Painting and Decorating as a driver. "I worked for them for a year with no [sick] days off, no late days, no trouble, mishaps, accidents ... anything like that," Mitchell said. "And by the sovereignty of God, they allowed me to join the Union."

Once in the Union, he began to attend apprentice school. "Miss Berry approached me and told me [joining Opportunity Alliance] would be a good opportunity for me. Then she coached me along. They gave me the opportunity to show my work ethic and build my work ethic with the company. And the Union and Opportunity Alliance – they've just been so helpful to me. Between the resources [they've made available to me] and the time they've spent counseling me, ... they've been very instrumental in building up my character."

Since being imprisoned, Mitchell's relationship with God has changed. "When you place a man alone by himself with just his thoughts and his conscience and his feelings and emotions and all of that for any long or extended period of time, that man is bound to look at himself in a different light. I got to look at myself through that different light, with the mirror of the scriptures to show me who I was and what I was doing and how I was destroying myself. It gave me a new purpose for living. When I came home and saw the effect of a prayer life and trusting and leaning on God, I was like, man! I was just blown away. I'd like to think I was so good at filling out the application, or I was so smooth and debonair and charming at the interview, but I can only attribute it to God. I can't take credit for [any of it]. ... All I have is perseverance, dedication and hard work, and that all comes from the Lord."

Mitchell said that being in the Union and training as a painter has made an "astronomical difference" in his life.

By David Weese

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Fox Valley Labor News 11/5/09

"It's like going from earth to the first supernova," he said. "They've shown me that I wasn't just placed in this position for my own good and for the sake of my own family, they've shown me that I've been placed here to help bring others along and to encourage people even if I can't bring them [into the Union]," Mitchell said. "I can show them that by the grace of God I made it."

Being a professional journeyman, that means something to my family and the people I grew up with. They used to look at me as always being behind bars, and 'Oh, Marcus is in trouble again,' and now it's been six years running, and 'Marcus ain't been in trouble, Marcus ain't been in anything.' It's like a miracle. I don't know how else to describe it," he said.

Mitchell says that he's proud to come home to his neighborhood at the end of the workday. "Having them see me in my whites with paint all over my face, and people are like, wow, you really do have a good job. ... It's just taken me to a whole other level of living. It makes you feel like part of society, and that you actually have something to contribute to humanity as a whole rather than just looking for something from humanity. I've got something to give back, and that's beautiful."

Mitchell says his goals are to continue to raise his children to love God, to love his wife the way she deserves, and to hold on to the values and morals he was taught as a boy, but got away from. He also wants to continue to show the people around him that he's "worth something. I want to continue to stay honest, stay dedicated, stay faithful, and stay a hard worker. It's my personal goal to stay focused and to stay moving forward."

At the graduation banquet, Mitchell was awarded the Norm Hankes award. Hankes was a former JATF committee chairman who passed away one day short of surgery that would have solved his heart problem. "Norm was a hard working, give ya the shirt off of his back if he thought you needed it more than he did kind of guy," said Gary Von Behren, former JATF coordinator. Von Behren described him as someone who was a "hard charging, totally honest" person that would "tell you what he thought. There was no pulling punches. ... That award is given for somebody who stands for what he did."

Mitchell is also trying to give back and to help others who are like he was. He is now an ordained minister and deacon in his church, and is ordained as a chaplain at the Cook County jail, "The same jail I was locked up in, now I've been going back there to preach the gospel. Not only is my career excelling, my spiritual life is excelling. My life-long goal is to pull people up."

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# How to Get Ahead of the Competition

Attend the  
Third Annual *Midwest Regional*  
**Union Finishing Contractors  
Conference**

**The Westin Lombard, IL**  
**February 5 & 6, 2010**



***Learn to Thrive - Right Here, Right Now***

#### **Who should attend this conference?**

Business Owners  
Management Teams (Superintendents, Foremen, Estimators, Safety Coordinators, etc.)  
Union Leadership  
Vendors / Associate Members

#### **Why should you attend this conference?**

Great Value! You get \$640 worth of conference for only \$99 or possibly FREE!  
Can help put you ahead of the competition in a challenging economy  
One day out of the office can have significant ROI

#### **What unique opportunities are we offering you?**

Networking with colleagues, union leadership and vendors  
Latest news & information that is trade specific  
Opportunity to speak with union leadership in an open forum

#### **Survey results from last year's conference:**

88% were satisfied or very satisfied with the conference material  
100% were satisfied or very satisfied with the speakers

# Conference Schedule (subject to change)

<b>Thursday, February 4</b>	8 am - 5 pm	<b>Pre-Conference Seminar:</b> LEED Green Associate Exam Prep (see below)
<b>Friday, February 5</b>	8:00 am	<b>Breakfast Buffet</b>
	9:00 am	<b>Opening Keynote</b> - Jimmy Williams, General President of International Union of Painters & Allied Trades
	10:30 am	<b>Panel Discussion:</b> Collective Bargaining Agreement Changes - Chuck Anderson, Painters District Council No. 30 Secretary-Treasurer, & Rick Vandegrift, FCAI President, will discuss contract changes. Stuart Binstock, CEO of Finishing Contractors Association, will moderate. You can submit your questions ahead of time. See the back page of this brochure for more information.
	12:00 pm	<b>Networking Luncheon</b>
	1:00 pm	<b>Education Sessions*</b>
	2:45 pm	<b>Education Sessions*</b>
	4:00 pm	<b>Cocktail Reception</b>
<b>Saturday, February 6</b>	8:00 am	<b>Breakfast Roundtable</b>
	9:15 am	<b>Education Sessions*</b>
	11:00 am	<b>Closing Keynote Luncheon</b> --Rick Wright, CEO, DRW Partners, Inc., "Leading Through Change"

\*Education Sessions will be based on 4 tracts: Leadership & Management Trends, Safety First, Emerging Technologies and Future of Marketing. A complete list of speakers and session titles will be released mid-December.

## Going Green

### Pre-Conference Seminar: **LEED Green Associate Exam Prep**

*Weber Grill, 2331 Fountain Square Dr, Lombard, IL*

Thursday, February 4, 2010 **8 am - 5 pm** (Lunch included in fee)

Facilitator Jennifer Eaton

(More details of this seminar will be released mid-December)

#### Why Go Green?

LEED is the most distinguished and widely accepted environmental design and green building certification. It is well established in both the public and private sectors for classifying a "green building". In the U.S. government, LEED is used at the General Services Administration, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Departments of State, Energy, Agriculture, Health and Human Services, and Interior to encourage and evaluate green building design and construction for all new and major renovation projects. Most states require new state funded projects to achieve a minimum level of LEED certification; and increasing numbers of local governments, higher education institutions, and public schools are encouraging or requiring their new facilities and major renovations to be LEED certified, particularly projects covered by stimulus funding under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

#### LEED Credentialing

Earning a LEED Accredited Professional (AP) credential now requires a two-tiered program. An individual needs to first earn the LEED Green Associate (GA) credential. It is important to remember that there is not one definite path contractors should take in regards to LEED training and a contractor's specific business should be taken into account when deciding for which route he or she is best suited. This exam prep is for the updated version (version 3) of the previous LEED for New Construction (version 2) exam prep. It is necessary to take this course even if you took the previous course and either did not pass the exam or did not take the exam.

#### LEED Green Associate Exam—Tier 1

The LEED GA exam is designed to test broad knowledge of sustainable design principles and basic understanding of the LEED rating systems. The GA exam tests a candidate's knowledge of what LEED is, the process through which a building becomes LEED certified, standard terminology, potential strategies for meeting sustainability goals, and how to be involved with and support other members of a LEED project team.

**Please note that because neither the LEED GA nor the LEED AP exams test an individual's trade specific knowledge, the prep course curriculum for these exams is not trade specific.**

# Conference Registration

**There are 4 easy ways to register:** 1) Fax this page to **630-264-7988**. 2) Mail this page to FCAI, 1991 W Downer Pl, Aurora, IL 60506. 3) Email [Kelly@NiPDi.com](mailto:Kelly@NiPDi.com) and tell her who is attending. 4) Call 630-264-7880 and tell us who is attending.

Company \_\_\_\_\_ Person Filling Out Form \_\_\_\_\_

Email of Person Filling Out Form \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Fax \_\_\_\_\_

Credit Card (circle one) MC Visa Discover Number \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Exp Date \_\_\_\_\_

	Attendee Name	Email of Attendee	By 1/8/2010	After 1/8/2010	Pre-Conf Seminar	Sub Total
FCAI / FCAC 1st Attendee			FREE	\$79	\$99	
FCAI / FCAC Addtl Attendee			\$99	\$119	\$99	
FCAI / FCAC Addtl Attendee			\$99	\$119	\$99	
NiPDi Contributor*			\$139	\$159	\$149	
Non-Member			\$179	\$199	\$199	

**\*NiPDi Contributors: Join FCAI for FREE then register by January 8th and your first attendee is FREE! Call 630-264-7880 to find out how to join.**

**Cancellation Policy** - You must cancel before January 27, 2010 to obtain a refund. Free registrations that are no-shows will be charged \$175. Please photocopy this page for additional attendees.

Make checks payable to FCA of Illinois.

Thank you for your registration!

## Conference Headquarters Hotel The Westin Lombard Yorktown Center

70 Yorktown Shopping Center, Lombard, IL 60148

Make your reservation by calling **630-719-8000**. Say you are with the **Finishing Contractors Association of Illinois**.

Or go to: [www.StarwoodMeeting.com/Book/BookNiPDi](http://www.StarwoodMeeting.com/Book/BookNiPDi).



Make your reservation by Thursday, **January 14, 2010** to receive the FCAI block rate of **only \$89** plus tax. **Make your reservation early before the block fills up!**



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www.FCAofIllinois.com

Do you want to excel in a sluggish economy?

Do you want to position yourself for when the economy recovers?

Do you want to rise above the competition?

***Learn to Thrive -  
Right Here, Right Now***

Have questions about the changes to the **Collective Bargaining Agreement?**

**You can submit up to 3 questions by:**

- 1) Emailing them to [Kelly@NiPDi.com](mailto:Kelly@NiPDi.com)
- 2) Faxing them to 630-264-7988
- 3) Mailing them to the return address

Attend the  
Third Annual *Midwest Regional*  
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to hear the answers!

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Life for a single mom can be a struggle. **Rhonda Stramka** could tell you all about it.

"I was a single mom with two kids, just trying to make ends meet," Stramka said. She had a cousin who was an ironworker, and "he saw me struggling, ...and tried to get me on at his [union] hall." But then her cousin worked a jobsite in East Peoria with some union glazers. After talking with them, he came back to Stramka and said, "You don't want to be an ironworker, you want to be a glazer."

Her cousin got her an interview with East Moline Glass Company, and Stramka's situation began to change for the better. "This job has made a tremendous difference in my life," Stramka said. Stramka had been working as the head cook at East Peoria High School, and moonlighting nights and weekends at a local restaurant. "I was making pretty good money," Stramka said, but things were still tough for her, as the long hours kept her from her kids.

Stramka said starting out on the job "was really scary. I knew I was capable. I just didn't know if the guys would give me an opportunity. But I was fortunate enough to get in with some really good journeymen that didn't hold [my gender] against me and were willing to teach me. They understood that if they don't pass the trade on that there's no future for them either. There's a few people that aren't really happy that I'm there. They haven't really said anything to me outright, but you can just tell. For the most part, I've been accepted really well, and I think that's because I don't expect any favoritism. If those guys are out there slopping in the mud carrying a full load, I'm right out there with them. I don't expect any favoritism whatsoever. I just don't think that's fair."

Stramka says that among her goals for the future is the desire to "keep learning. I've been here three years, and there's so much out there that I just haven't seen [in that time]. ...I just want to keep absorbing and learning and staying safe.

"I think Opportunity Alliance is a wonderful school for the trades, and I'm glad to see that it's going out to more trades," she said. "...I think there's a lot of really capable single moms out there that could fulfill the role if they were just given some help."

Stramka also said that working a normal 40-hour work week gives her more of an opportunity to be a good mom to her kids. "Trying to do it all can be really tough." She also said, "This job has given me the ability to save for my kids [college]."

Stramka was awarded the Secretary-Treasurer award at Thursday's banquet which JATF Coordinator Gary Von Behren said is given to people dedicated to the Union. "Their real strong suit is their involvement in the Union," he said. "These are the people that when asked, or without being asked, are there when you need them. They go to the meetings, they get involved in Union activities ...they're just there, especially when you need them."

Stramka says she is really grateful to her cousin and to the company for giving her a chance. "They really changed my life," she said. "I just strive to do the best that I can so that I don't let any of them down or let myself down." ❧



# IMSCA

Illinois Mechanical & Specialty Contractors Association

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[WWW.IMSCA.ORG](http://WWW.IMSCA.ORG)

## INVITES YOU TO JOIN US FOR OUR GUBERNATORIAL CANDIDATE'S FORUM...

**MONDAY JANUARY 11, 2010**

**9:00 A.M. TO 11:00 A.M.**

**ORLAND PARK CIVIC CENTER**

**14750 RAVINIA AVENUE IN ORLAND PARK IL**

IMSCA is the principle legislative voice of the rights of the subcontracting industry in Illinois, representing over 2,000 Illinois union construction employers. IMSCA contractors employ tens of thousands of Illinois residents located in every corner of the state.

The year 2010 will be an election year for Illinois governor, therefore, we ask for your input in this forum and your help to introduce the power of the voice of IMSCA. There will be a question and answer period.

Join us for this opportunity to hear the views and plans of the gubernatorial candidates. Enjoy a casual breakfast, take advantage of the chance to connect with your peers, and meet the aspirants in a forum designed with you in mind. Attendance is free, but please pre-register so we know how many to expect.



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## Upcoming FCAI Events

**December 10, 2009**

FCAI Holiday Party  
Eagle Brook Country Club, Geneva

**January 14, 2010**

FCAI Annual Meeting  
CityGate Grille, Naperville

**February 5 & 6, 2010**

FCAI 3rd Annual Conference  
The Westin, Lombard