
leadership

Problem Solved

Louis King and Summit Academy OIC are creating jobs by equipping those who need them most. **BY NANCY EIKE**

LIKE ALL GREAT LEADERS, Louis King is a problem solver. When he took note of many minorities lacking jobs, education, as well as a sense of purpose and pride, he set out to find a solution. When he saw that companies weren't meeting minority-hiring goals, he organized a protest. When he realized the minority job-training programs that were already in place were giving individuals job skills but weren't addressing the important life skills component, he created a program that did.

He founded the nonprofit Summit Academy OIC in 1996, and has been changing people's lives ever since.

Summit Academy offers a twenty-week, accredited training program that "prepares and empowers adults living in the most economically depressed neighborhoods in the Twin Cities to become educated, employed, contributing members of their communities," says King. "The best social service program in the world is a job."

Each year, approximately 400 students enroll in one of Summit Academy's numerous job-training programs, which include carpentry, plumbing, electrical, heavy equipment operation, health care and others. The programs consist of two 10-week sections, the first being instructional learning with lectures directly related to the discipline, and life skills courses that include parenting, financial preparedness and relationship-building.

"We separate the genders and really get beyond why someone might be in a rut," says Alex Tittle, support services manager. "We help show them what they have to do to get beyond that, to be successful."

The second part consists of hands-on learning in one of the many on-site labs.

Students must have their GED, pass the entrance



PHOTO BY MARSHALL FRANKLIN LONG

eat the book

Executive & Leadership Coaching firm CO2 Partners presents the **Eat the Book Leadership Series** featuring local industry experts, acclaimed professors and world-renowned business writers. Topics range from leadership, personal success stories and decision-making to operational performance, teamwork and other current issues. Join other organizational leaders like you for an opportunity to hear from these exceptional speakers, share experiences and exchange ideas.

Upcoming Events:

August 24th
Aaron Keller
Market Impact through Design

September 28th
Steve Boehlke
50 Ways to Lead Others

October 26th
Cali Ressler and Jody Thompson
Create a Results-Only Work Environment

Time: 7:30-9:00 a.m.
Location: LEVEL Brand
724 North First Street,
Minneapolis, MN 55401

To register & for a complete list of speakers & directions, visit us at www.co2partners.com/events

“Any time you lower the standards and someone doesn’t have to meet that top standard, then that means they can’t get the top prize; there are no shortcuts here.”—LOUIS KING, CEO AND PRESIDENT, SUMMIT ACADEMY OIC

test, and have a desire to be there. “If you can’t be here 85 percent of the time,” King tells his students, “then come back when you can.” Many have had run-ins with the law, drug problems, domestic abuse issues and some are living in shelters, but King and Summit Academy don’t buy into the coddling mentality.

“Any time you lower the standards and someone doesn’t have to meet that top standard, then that means they can’t get the top prize,” says King. “There are no shortcuts here.”

King’s “no shortcut” approach is evident in his brokering of partnerships with some of the state’s largest construction companies such as Mortenson Construction, Veit Construction, Stock Roofing, and some of the larger unions, including the electrical union, all of which helped create the training programs to ensure the students were prepared for the specific jobs the company had in mind.

Putting this into practice, a number of Summit Academy students were trained by Mortenson and put to work on the new home of the Minnesota Twins, Target Field. “We were the largest employer of job-training workers,” says King. “And we are pleased to report that the minority hiring goals were exceeded on that project.”

King’s students have also worked on the TCF Stadium, the light rail transit system, as well as 40 who worked on the Green Roof at the Target Center, after Summit Academy implemented a Green Initiatives curriculum to instruct the students on the technicalities of the craft; 25 of them are still on the project. And, together with polar explorer and environmentalist Will Steger, they have co-founded HIRE Minnesota,

an organization that works to make sure people of color and women account for 10 percent of new jobs that are created by federal stimulus funds in the areas of health care, infrastructure and renewable energy.

BIZBRIEFING

Summit Academy OIC

Headquarters:
Minneapolis
Inception: 1996
Employees: 43
Website: saoic.org

LEADER PROFILE


Louis King

Title: President and CEO
Age: 50
Education: BA,
Morehouse College
Family: Wife, Beverly;
children, Aja, Kamaria,
Lauryn

With all of this hard work and determination paying off, it’s little wonder, then, that Summit Academy is looking to expand into St. Paul after the East Metro OIC closed its doors over the winter. In an effort to begin building those relationships, Summit Academy has partnered with several nonprofits to offer free transportation for up to 60 students to the Minneapolis facility until a St. Paul site can be procured.

“We hope to have enrollment up to 1,200 in the next four years once the St. Paul facility is up and running,” says King. “We also hope to open an American Indian training center in Mille Lacs or somewhere up [in greater Minnesota] to ensure outstate hiring goals are met and money is kept on the reservations.”

Summit Academy has turned out hundreds of students who have increased their annual salary from an average of approximately \$3,700 per year to upwards of \$40,000, with the likelihood of extra earning potential. The academy’s success rate is one of the highest, at 73 percent, and has given hundreds of people a chance at a life they otherwise never would have had.

“We hear people say all the time, ‘I never got a shot,’” says King, who has garnered the General Mills’ Local Legend Award and the Minnesota African-American Heritage Award for his hard-earned efforts. “Well, now you’ve got your shot.” 

CO₂

minnesota
BUSINESS

Holmes Center
for Entrepreneurship

LEVEL