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The Green Economy: Saving Energy And Making Money



Reporting
Don Shelby

(WCCO) Global warming may be among the biggest threats to humanity, but it may also be a huge opportunity. The new economy will mean more green, as in saving energy and making money. So there's a program that trains inner-city workers to specialize in environmental construction.

The students at Summit Academy in Minneapolis are getting hands-on training in green construction. They're building a model home to study weatherization that will save energy on heating and cooling.

"Let's remember when we're putting this insulation up, we can't have any gaps in here," said instructor Michael Wenzel.

He expects federal stimulus money will flow into retrofitting older homes in the cities. The work may cost more in the beginning, but it will pay off down the road.

James Bonet makes sure the students learn it all by the book in the classroom. It's all part of HIRE Minnesota -- a coalition of groups committed to development and training for green collar jobs.

"Communities of color are moving in the forefront of environmentalism. Why is that?" asked WCCO's Don Shelby.

"Because just like with the tech boom, this is the beginning. People are not locked out. They'll get in on the early phase. In actuality, there's no real market yet. So we're taking a shot and getting out there," said Louis King, the CEO of Summit Academy.

He says they're leading the nation with a program like this.

"Just like we saw the guys with the pocket protectors and the calculators on their hip and people called them geeks, and now they call them Mr. Gates," said King. "We're going to make the green thing a real thing for young men and women so that they can talk about growing up being environmental engineers, being part of renewable energy and energy efficiency. It all starts right here."

"People are looking for jobs; they're not looking for handouts. They want jobs, real jobs," said polar explorer Will Steger.

Steger is involved because he sees an opportunity to help the environment and revitalize inner-cities.

"I would predict this: probably in 10 years we're going to see solar panels on all flat buildings. That's an economic boom in itself. But someone has to install those solar panels, someone has to maintain them. You can't do that over in China," he said.

After working in customer service, Thomas Young took a chance on starting a new career. When he graduates from Summit Academy, he's going to start a company specializing in green building. He's got other plans too.

"Hopefully, one day I'll be able to get a couple of my friends from here to start and build my own house," said Young.

And that's exactly what King hopes these students will gain from Summit Academy.

"At the end of the day you can not take away the dignity that they have because they've acquired skills," he said. "No one can ever take that from them. And they add value to their families and to this community and that keeps us going. And you're right, in 20 years we will have literally changed the complexion of this work force."



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