

Tuesday, Apr 26, 2011

Global/Local Communities Neighborhoods Work & Economy Politics & Policy Arts & Lifestyle Opinion Special Sections

## Green jobs? Say what?



By MSR file photo  
 Lori Anderson

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 March 23, 2011

We have been bombarded with the word "green" for a number of years and told this is where things are going. We have been urged to become aware of the concept and get involved in the "green economy." Okay then, what is "green," and what does that have to do with getting jobs and being involved in the "green economy"?

According to The Urban Green Partnership.org, "Green is the design, commercialization and use of processes and products that are feasible and economical while reducing the generation of pollution at the source and minimizing the risk to human health and the environment."

In order to determine the greenness of a particular job, what is considered is the degree to which the position was directly related and/or

essential to a green product, green service or green process (where green refers to something that results in environmental benefit or sustainability.)

Okay now, what does this have to do with where jobs are, where jobs are going, and where one begins a green job search? For many years, lobbyists, local officials and state representatives have been working on developing funding sources and tax incentives that would make solar paneling and other renewable energy sources more affordable.



Ralph Jacobson, CEO of Innovative Power Systems, Minnesota's largest solar paneling installer since 1991, says, "There has never been a better time than now to tap into a laundry list of tax credits, rebates, and other financial incentives designed to encourage individuals and businesses to go green. At the federal level in the U.S., individuals can reap the rewards of at least eight different financial incentives ranging from tax credits and home loans for replacing windows and installing insulation around the house to tax rebates for hooking up a solar hot water heater."

Jacobson is a solar installer and educator since 2009. He last served as president of the Minnesota Solar Energy Industry Association. Mr. Jacobson has worked with Summit Academy OIC and other institutions on solar paneling design, installation and education and has a unique perspective on what a green job is in the real world.

The following illustrates how a person's current skills can be applied to a green job in the "new economy": solar paneling fabrication, electricians (installing solar), construction (roofing, exterior construction), sales (solar site assessment) and feasibility (zoning issues, design). There are also opportunities in design, bookkeeping, crew leadership, parts, administration, work crews, inspection and management.

It's clear that a person still needs to know what he or she wants to do as a career; then, green principles and conservation practices would be applied to that job's daily duties.

Lori Anderson is project manager for the Green Jobs Employer Services Division of HIRED in Bloomington. Founded in 1968, HIRED is a leading Twin Cities-area provider of job-skills and employment training that assists disadvantaged people and other job seekers to become qualified for and obtain employment. They enroll more than 10,000 persons annually in a number of programs designed to assist low-income adults, dislocated workers, welfare-to-work individuals, refugees and youth. In addition, HIRED provides recruitment and retention services for hundreds of employers each year, as reported by HIRED.org.

Anderson offers a unique insight into the concept of green jobs and what people should do about getting green jobs or jobs in this economic downturn. Asked what should be a top priority for the green-jobs seeker, she replied, "Knowing yourself and having a clear image of who you are and what you have to offer to the employer." She said that knowing yourself and working on personal growth are paramount when it comes to interviews and the hard questions that prospective employers ask.

"It is so competitive," said Anderson, "that a prospective employee not only has to dress appropriately but also be able to speak in a clear manner and use business communication skills when dealing with customers and perspective clients."

HIRED develops interpersonal skills and effective communication. They also offer workshops and classes dealing with resumes, job search, education and training options.

The WorkForce Centers (funded by the State of Minnesota) and The Blue Green Alliance Foundation have partnered to offer a Green Specialist Training Program that addresses green principles in the business and

private sector. HIRED also offers training called M-Powered that helps to prepare workers for careers in the metalworking manufacturing industry. Its focus is on lower wage and unemployed workers.

In their first 12-week session of classroom training, participants are taught basic skills such as applied math, measuring, print reading and job safety. During Level 3, program participants are placed in M-Powered companies for three-month, structured, on-the-job training in their chosen field.

Cathy Carney, workforce development operations manager for both the south and north offices of the Minneapolis WorkForce Centers, said that these two facilities will be making big changes in the upcoming months and will focus more on not just getting a job, but on training and outreach.

There were 32,860 visits to the Resource Room on the north side and 54,117 visits to the south side Resource Room in 2010. These numbers contain duplicate counts, which means individuals are coming many times; nevertheless, where there is the greatest need, there is the least attendance. The WorkForce Center looks to meet the greater need, develop a new environment, and offer a wider range of classes and curriculum.

Carney and her staff have identified a number of areas at the WorkForce Center that show room for improvement, the first being basic computer literacy classes and the second being information on community resources. Since 61 percent of those served are African or African American and Minneapolis has the highest number of Somali immigrants, there is a great need for communication and innovation. The WorkForce Center looks to raise the bar and bring their skills and assets to the table, increase efficiency, and create a better environment for all.

The Resource Rooms were designed originally as a self-help service with the philosophy that job seekers could find their own employment if provided with the technology. Without a mechanism in place to know how many people actually get a job through the WorkForce Center or what the value is for the individual, Carney looks to increase attendance in both locations by redeveloping the Resource Rooms to become "learning labs" with a focus on building assets with directed learning, open lab time for job seekers, and more.

This direction would seem to be in line with the Career Builders 2011 Job Forecast by Barbara Safani and the Occupational Employment Projections to 2012. They both show the most growth through 2012 will be in skilled professional positions such as management, business and financial occupations. Rounding out the top four would be professional and related occupations, service occupations, sales, and office and administrative support.

Remember that knowing what green is and using it to your advantage would be considered a worthwhile plan overall. Whether young, middle-aged or semi-retired, a person should plan to stay on top of green trends and opportunities. You could be a handyman working in the community and still need to know how to save homeowners money on materials or energy conservation, or how to save a business money with a conservation plan if you repair and install sprinklers systems.

Whatever you decide to do regarding employment, re-employment, training or education, now is the time. There are opportunities available for someone who is looking; you just need to get involved in the "green economy" and do all you can to make sure you're not left behind saying, "I didn't know that was going on" or "I wish I had known I needed that."

To learn more about computer training, counseling, education, jobs, green jobs or any other element of this article, visit [www.positivelymn.com](http://www.positivelymn.com), [www.hennepintech.edu](http://www.hennepintech.edu), or [www.HIRED.org](http://www.HIRED.org).

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