

*Sat Apr 14 2018*  
JOB TRAINING

# Building better workers

Classroom learning, life skills coaching, practical experience

*By Paul Newlson*



Skip Dickstein / Times Union The Rev. Richard Parsons, left and Roger Hull speak outside 962 Vermont Ave. which is a construction project underwritten by Hull's program, **Schenectady-WIN**, which stands for Working in Neighborhoods.



Skip dickstein / times union Workers (from left) Jie ma, Benjamin douglas, Carlyle Hannibal, maggie marinucci and Gurlene Bolton discuss their renovation of a home at 962 Vermont Ave in Schenectady.

### *Schenectady*

Keenan Chandler has always been interested in construction work, and after six weeks in the classroom he can't wait to get out into the field and get some real-world practical experience.

On Friday, the 2017 Schenectady High School graduate was one of five participants in former Union College President Roger Hull's **Schenectady-WIN** (Working in Neighborhoods) program who received their county certificate of employability at

Washington Irving Education Center in Hamilton Hill.

On Monday the group will begin the introduction to construction program.

"I have friends in the hood that are doing bad stuff, selling drugs," said Chandler, 20, on Friday outside the classroom.

A few miles away in the Mont Pleasant neighborhood, Gurlene Bolton and Benjamin Douglass donned hard hats as they used a special spray liquid to seal up crevices in the wall of a vacant Vermont Avenue building next to New Day Christian Empowerment Center that is being converted into a community center.

Bolton, a mother of three, said the program is convenient because it's close to her house and she can take it while her children are in school.

"It's a good thing that it's free because I have children and can't afford it," she said, adding her office job with a construction firm.

Pastor Richard Parsons, who has a background in construction, watched over her and the others. He's taught them carpentry, painting, drywall installation, how to frame a way and the proper way to hammer a nail.

**Schenectady-WIN** started out in January 2017 with about a dozen students but dwindled to five, said Hull.

He used his own money to get the program off the ground and cover the cost of a life skills coach and has partnered with the Schenectady school district, which provides the classroom instruction. Two donors also contribute.

"This struck me as being a way of trying to help save some lives," Hull said. "This an attempt, a tiny attempt, to try to get people to go from welfare to work."

**Schenectady-WIN** is also the name of Hull's foundation. The annual budget is about \$100,000.

Once they complete their field work, the participants receive their OSHA certification that they can work on a construction site as well as a county certificate of employability that signals to a prospective employer they have had training in basic skills, including how to answer a phone or the importance of showing up to work on time.

Hull recalls a conversation during one of his campaigns for mayor with Schenectady-based contractor Rockie Mann that provided the spark for **Schenectady-WIN**. Mann will hire the inaugural class once they complete the program, said Hull.

He anticipates the sophomore class to have upwards of 22 students

"This is a situation where over an 18-month period somebody can get a high school degree,

certificate of employability, OSHA card, construction trade, and a guaranteed position," said Hull.

Qadir Islam, a life coach with the nonprofit group Universal Concepts, used mnemonics, sometimes in rapid-fire fashion to help reinforce concepts such as relationships between men and women and the destructiveness of violence. One of the central themes was words make people.

"They look at words differently now ... because words describe themselves," Islam added.

Chandler said his mother, Sonja Bell, told him about the program, which she learned of while taking classes at Washington Irving.

"I would recommend this program for anybody who's trying to change, trying to do better for themselves to get the meaning of life," said Chandler.

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