

## INDUSTRY NEWS

# Changing the world, one apprentice at a time

CHICAGO — Linda Hannah is a 5'2" dynamo who has become a local leader in preparing young people for careers in mechanical construction and other construction trades. Described by the Mechanical Contractors Association of Chicago as "an expert on labor issues affecting minorities, a committed labor recruiter, and caring, compassionate advocate for a diverse workplace in the trades," she has redesigned the former Skill Builders Program, now calling it the "New Skill Builders Program."

Through the program, Hannah directs unprepared appli-

cants to community organizations, churches, and Workforce centers where classes in math and reading will prepare them for the New Skill Builder 13-week class.

Getting into a construction apprenticeship program can be challenging for students who have difficulty with the testing process. Young people applying for apprenticeships must pass Adult Basic skills tests in reading and math. The New Skill Builders Program is designed to help candidates improve their skills and understand the application process in order to secure an appren-

ticeship in the building trades.

"When they come to our 13-week program we introduce them to the trades, basic construction skills, interviewing skills, time management skills, budgeting, and conduct test preparation classes," Hannah explained. "We teach them the expectations of the construction industry, and show them what they can expect from the trades. These young people didn't realize they could get paid while they go through an apprenticeship program and make \$60,000 or \$70,000 a year when they complete the program – plus



Linda Hannah

get great health and welfare benefits. It's so rewarding to see young adults who thought they had no future embrace the idea that they can have a

*Turn to Changing, page 84*

## Changing the world

*Continued from page 5*

promising future through the trades."

Through her long history as a recruiter for Pipefitters Local Union 597, Hannah has become an expert at getting students excited about the apprenticeship program at the Local 597 Training Center. Hannah sees construction careers as under-valued by the public and works to get minority students involved in an education program that has become high-tech, often leading to the independence of owning a business.

For a woman who began her career in bank management, Hannah found her greatest career gratification when she realized how many Chicago-area teens simply had no idea how to go about finding the right career for themselves and preparing themselves for it.

"Mentors should have a sincere 'like' for teens and remember their own teen years," Hannah said. "A mentor should be willing to share a piece of their life history; go beyond lecturing; be shock proof and, above all, not be in need of immediate gratification."

She has used her motivational philosophy to provide pro bono technical assistance for start-up mentorship programs such as The African-American State Farm Insurance Agents; the carpenters' union Sisters in the Brotherhood Mentorship Program; and the Chicago Freedom School.

While she knows that mentoring is not a cure all, she believes in the African proverb: "Each one teach one." She is willing to teach as many program managers and mentors as possible so that her concepts can be replicated.