

# 'BOOT CAMP' TEACHES SKILLS

## Community groups, utilities boost training

By PAUL RESTUCCIA

Alex Zhou was a bus driver for a Chinatown company offering no benefits before he landed a job as a weatherization technician in the Bay State's growing "green" economy.

There are already dozens of green-energy training programs in community colleges and vocational high schools across the state, but thanks to pilot programs offered by a coalition of local community groups, unions and energy-efficiency contractors, a more diverse group of people are finding a place in the "green-collar" industry.

"Green energy is one of the few growing industries in the state that can provide good jobs for urban working-class people," says Mark Liu, green justice coordinator for the Chinese Progressive Association, one of the participating organizations. The pilot program is funded by the state's utility companies and Massachusetts' SkillWorks work-force initiative.

"The number of people working in the residential green jobs sector has tripled since 2008," says Kevin Doyle, co-chairman of the Workforce Development Group at the New England Clean Energy Council. According to a 2009 council study, the 800 jobs in the industry were expected to grow to 2,600 by this year, and Doyle says the actual numbers are exceeding that prediction. "Green-energy companies in the state are hiring. There are hundreds of job openings."

Jobs for weatherization technicians and home energy auditors paying anywhere from \$15 to \$25 an hour are

plentiful, but training is required to qualify for them.

Zhou, a 28-year-old Quincy resident, attended a weatherization "boot camp" in Fitchburg last year under the auspices of the local International Union of Painters and Allied Trades, where he learned to install insulation in walls and around pipes, replace windows and doors and perform other energy-efficiency improvements.

Now he's working for Methuen-based environmental contractor the Aulson Co. making \$18.40 an hour as a weatherization technician. He's also a member of the local painters union.

"I was looking for a job that paid better and gave me benefits," said Zhou. "It's a good job, a little dirty sometimes, but I enjoy it. It's good helping people save energy."

The Chelsea Collaborative is also running a similar pilot program that has already trained 12 Chelsea residents to become weatherization technicians.

"Our goal is to get access to the green economy for people in our community," said Jovanna Garcia Soto, the lead organizer for the Collaborative's Chelsea Greenspace Committee. "And the jobs we are creating here will help struggling homeowners weatherize their homes."

The Chelsea Collaborative has just started work on weatherizing 50 Chelsea houses, arranging for no-interest micro-loans through a local bank to help homeowners pay for the 25 percent of weatherization costs not covered by the Mass Save initiative run by Nstar and National Grid that offers 75 percent (up to \$2,000) in

rebates for home-energy improvements.

As part of the program, Chelsea resident Carlos Calderon has just started

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working as a weatherization technician for Insul-Pro Insulation, an Abington-based company, after taking a 10-week training program at the New England Regional Council of Carpenters headquarters in Dorchester. Calderon learned about materials used for insulation and how to test to locate air leakage.

"I like every aspect of the job," said Calderon, 28, a father of two who had been unemployed. "It feels very fulfilling to help Chelsea people reduce their energy bills and help the environment at the same time."

Calderon is making \$18 an hour at the job and is also enrolled in a four-year apprenticeship program with the carpenters' union.

"It's a great deal," Calderon added. "I'll get to become a carpenter, which is what I eventually want to do. And the good thing is that this program is providing jobs for Chelsea people."

The Asian American Civic Association's Energy-Efficiency Technician Apprenticeship pilot program is attracting people from across the city. The program provides 2,200 hours of paid on-the-job training and 182.5 hours of classroom instruction, creating energy-efficiency technicians that have the skills of energy auditors and weatherization technicians.

Six people are taking the current apprenticeship program, including Brighton resident Nesli Francois, who is two-thirds of the

way through and working at Westboro-based Conservation Services Group, one of the state's largest energy-efficiency companies.

"It's a very challenging program, but I like it and I'm learning new things every day," says the 38-year-old Haitian native and father of two, who immigrated to the United States several years ago.

"Our mission is to help low-income and unemployed people create a career and be self-sustaining," said Chris Albrizio, director of green programs for the Asian American Civic Association. "The apprenticeship idea is geared to helping candidates succeed on the job as well as in the classroom."

Francois had been looking for a job in building maintenance before enrolling in the program. He says the classroom training focuses on all aspects of building science, from heating systems to energy conservation, and that he is now doing air sealing and insulation work for the company.

"They say they like my work, and I hope to stay on there after I finish the program," Francois says. "I like the green-energy field because it's hands-on but you also have to think."

There are also programs in other Bay State cities to train or retrain people for green jobs. The state's "Pathways Out of Poverty" Initiative provided \$200,000 each to Lowell, Brockton, Worcester, Pittsfield and Holyoke. One group that administered the program, JFY Networks in Lowell, has had great success, already placing all 20 of its green-energy trainees into jobs after their first round of training.

Lowell resident Maurice Lefebvre, a 53-year-old former Realtor, graduated from

a nine-week, full-time training program at JFY in December. In mid-February, he got a job as a home energy auditor at Next Step Living, a Boston-based energy-efficiency contractor, which pays \$40,000 a year.

"As a Realtor, I'd always been interested in saving energy and this job has given me the knowledge to help people do just that," says Lefebvre, who opted for a career change after the real estate market plunged.

Marybeth Campbell, the work-force development director for the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center, says that a second round of "Pathways Out of Poverty" funding, which has already placed 113 full-time workers

(out of a total of 200 trainees) in green-collar jobs, will be made next month.

Campbell suggests that people looking to enter the green-energy field go to one of the 37 One Stop Career centers scattered around Massachusetts or check out training opportunities at [cleanenergyeducation.org](http://cleanenergyeducation.org).

"We plan to have more on-the-job training in the next funding round," says Campbell. "These green-energy training programs not only teach people weatherization, but also resume writing and basic job skills. Overall, they've been successful and we're learning how to make them even better."



COURTESY PHOTO

**Carlos Calderon speaks in Chelsea in front of a home he weatherized.**



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**Chelsea Collaborative staff, Green Justice Coalition and New England Carpenters Union members along with Nstar, National Grid and city of Chelsea officials take part in a ribbon cutting at the first house to be weatherized in Chelsea under a pilot program.**