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MAKING A *DIFFERENCE* IN THE COMMUNITY: The Superfund Job Training Initiative in Jacksonville, Florida



INTRODUCTION

The Jacksonville Superfund Job Training Initiative (SuperJTI) is an environmental remediation job readiness program that provided career development opportunities for 26 trainees living near two Superfund sites – the Jacksonville Ash and Brown’s Dump sites – in Jacksonville, Florida. The City of Jacksonville’s Project New Ground is implementing cleanups for these sites. Through a partnership with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the City of Jacksonville, I-TECH Personnel Services, Florida State College at Jacksonville, Fresh Ministries and The Hester Group, Jacksonville SuperJTI provided local job-seekers with new skills and work experience. EPA’s goal is to help the community create job opportunities and partnerships that remain long after the site cleanups have been completed.



CANDIDATE OUTREACH, RECRUITMENT AND SCREENING: MARCH 2010

Jacksonville SuperJTI staff and community partner The Hester Group created a website, distributed fliers and hosted orientation sessions to publicize the job training program and attract interested candidates. The website received over 700 hits and 238 interested candidates attended the program’s four orientation sessions. Following these sessions, 130 people completed a preliminary testing stage and 94 of those participants were invited to attend the program’s tryouts. Forty-three participants decided to continue with the program tryouts.

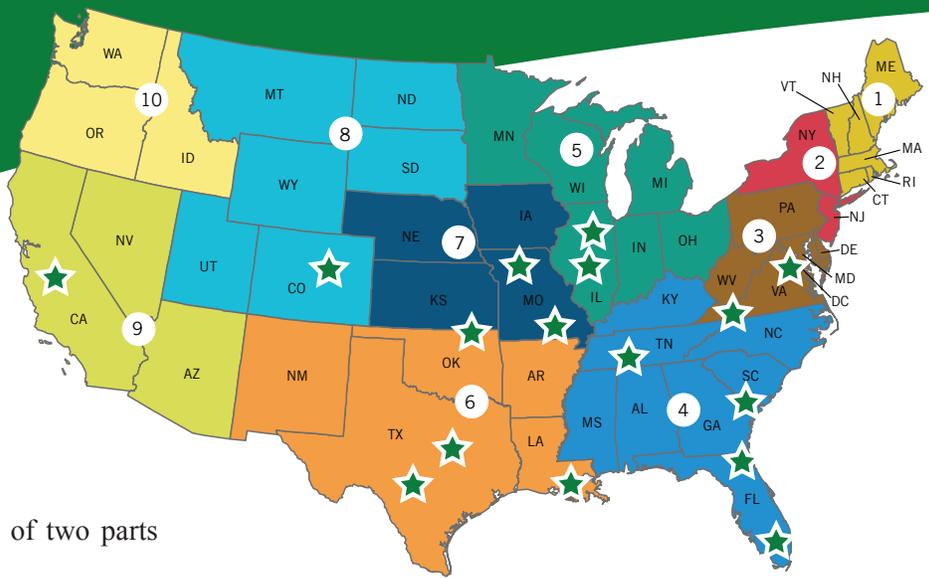
Program tryouts were conducted over two days and included leadership, team building and role-playing activities, basic physical fitness evaluation, and observation by a team of 12 evaluators representing the project’s partners. Following the tryouts, 26 trainees were selected.

SITE HISTORIES: JACKSONVILLE ASH AND BROWN’S DUMP

At the turn of the 20th century, the City of Jacksonville burned its solid waste in incinerators. Ash from those incinerators was created and/or deposited at four locations north and west of the downtown area. Although incineration ceased in the 1960s, ash remains embedded in area soils. Project New Ground is the city’s initiative to remove the ash from these areas. Three of these areas – the Forest Street Incinerator, the 5th & Cleveland Incinerator, and the Lonnie C. Miller, Sr. Park – comprise the Jacksonville Ash Superfund site. The fourth area is the Brown’s Dump Superfund site.

Because Project New Ground is such an extensive project, cleanup activities will take several years, and are scheduled to continue through about 2013. The sites are not listed on EPA’s National Priorities List (NPL) of contaminated sites, but are considered to be NPL-caliber and are being addressed through the Superfund Alternative Approach. This approach uses the same investigation and cleanup process and standards used for sites listed on the NPL.





TRAINING: APRIL 2010

The Jacksonville SuperJTI training consisted of two parts and took place over the course of three weeks.

- **Pre-Employment and Lifeskills Training:** Trainees completed courses in career planning, interpersonal communication, money management, and effective work habits. The training was provided by project partner Fresh Ministries.
- **Technical Training:** Trainees completed the 40-hour Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Response (HAZWOPER) training as well as CPR and first aid training. The training was provided by project partner Florida State College at Jacksonville.

Upon completion of the program, trainees possess the marketable skills needed to begin a successful career in environmental remediation and become valuable members of the community’s workforce.

Jacksonville SuperJTI is one of the many SuperJTI job training projects nationwide that are making a difference for underserved citizens living in communities affected by Superfund sites.



Graduation speakers included City of Jacksonville Site Investigation and Remediation Manager Jim Manning (left) and EPA Region 4 Superfund Program Division Director Franklin E. Hill (right).

THE JACKSONVILLE SUPERJTI TRAINEES:

- **Are a diverse group.** The trainees include 21 African Americans, 3 Caucasians, and 2 Hispanics. Eight trainees are military veterans.
- **Live predominantly in areas affected by the Superfund sites.** Seventy-seven percent of the trainees (20 people) live in these neighborhoods. Fifteen percent of the trainees (4 people) live in other parts of Jacksonville, and eight percent of the trainees (2 people) live in the greater Jacksonville area.
- **Include younger and older populations.** Eleven trainees are in their 30s or younger. Fifteen trainees are in their 40s or older.

JOB PLACEMENT AND FOLLOW-UP: MAY 2010 – MAY 2011

After graduation, trainees interviewed with project partner and site contractor staffing agency I-TECH Personnel Services for available Project New Ground positions. Graduates were placed into positions as environmental technicians, dump truck drivers and heavy equipment operators.

Jacksonville SuperJTI staff will conduct program follow-up with the graduates as well as their supervisors for one year after entering into employment. During this time period, graduates may change positions but are required to maintain employment, either with Project New Ground or another employer.



SJTI COMMUNITY PROFILES: Making a Difference

Jay Lowe



When Jay Lowe first visited Florida on a business trip, he knew he wanted to stay. "I saw all this flat land, and it was green all year;" he said. "I knew this was where I wanted to be." As the former police officer and his wife sought employment in northern Florida, they heard a radio advertisement for Jacksonville SuperJTI and Lowe decided to attend the orientation session. A longtime martial arts instructor, he had no problems passing the program's physical exams and was selected as a trainee after passing the program's rigorous screening process. "There were 26 of us who participated in lifeskills and technical training," Lowe said. "We ended up working together a lot – my favorite part of the training was the problem-solving exercises."

Following the training, Jay's commercial driving license and years of experience as a supervisor made him an ideal candidate for position openings with Project New Ground. Today, he works as a truck fleet manager for the on-site contractor. "I find the remediation process quite interesting. We are digging up as much as two feet of contaminated dirt and replacing it with clean soil," he said. "The work brings us into regular contact with property owners at the affected sites, and it's one of the best parts of the job to see what a difference the cleanup is making for those neighborhoods."

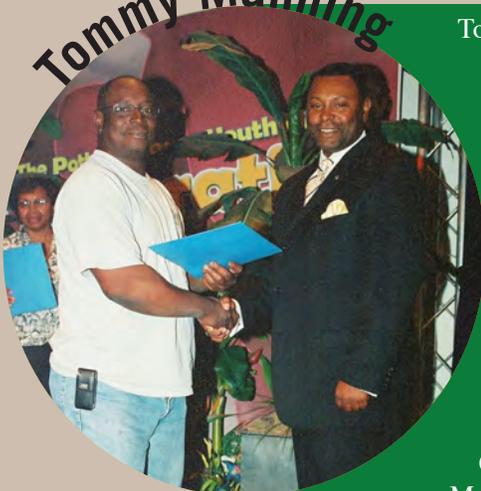
Gracie McClarty was looking for new opportunities. Having heard about Jacksonville SuperJTI through community partner The Hester Group, she decided to give it a shot. "Several hundred people showed up initially and, after several days of interviews and testing, I was chosen to participate in the training program," she recalled. "Everything was beautiful. We learned how to prepare a resume and how to grow as a person, both personally and professionally."

Until the 1960s, the City of Jacksonville burned industrial waste in incinerators that caused lead-contaminated ash to settle across area soils. A 52-year-old Jacksonville native, McClarty grew up unaware of the potential effects of lead poisoning. "The school I went to was right next to an incinerator, and we would often play in the dirt," she said. Now McClarty works as an equipment operator in a facility that processes the contaminated soil. "My experience in the program was just beautiful," she said. "We're like one big family."

Gracie McClarty



Tommy Manning



Tommy Manning was eager to get back to work. The former construction worker had been unemployed for nearly a year when he heard about Jacksonville SuperJTI through Work Source, a job placement service. "We started out with physical assessments to make sure we had the basic strength and flexibility to perform the work," he said. "I didn't start out in great shape, but gradually it got easier." Then Manning and his fellow trainees took a series of classes focused on self-improvement and team building. "I learned a lot about how to budget my money," he said. "We also learned how to block out negative influences and focus on what you can do to make situations more positive."

Growing up in Jacksonville, Manning had some knowledge of the sites and the contamination, but said that the training gave him a wealth of new knowledge about public health and safety. "Now I work as a truck driver for Project New Ground, where I'm able to put my technical training into practical use," he reflected. Manning also lauds the bonds formed among his classmates. "It's more like we're friends than co-workers. And I still get a call every month from The Hester Group to see how the job is going, which is really nice."

What is the SuperJTI Program?

The Superfund Job Training Initiative, or SuperJTI, supports job readiness programs in communities affected by nearby Superfund sites and encourages the employment of trainees at local site cleanups. The SuperJTI program combines extensive classroom instruction with hands-on work experience for each participant. Upon completion of the program, each participant possesses the marketable skills required to become a valuable member of the community's workforce. EPA offers SuperJTI training through its Technical Assistance Services for Communities (TASC) contract at no cost to training participants.

For more information, please visit:
www.epa.gov/superfund/community/sfjti



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