



PHOTOS BY LEO JARZOMB / STAFF

PITCHING IN: Muir High School student Joel Ramirez, 16, employed through the Mentoring and Partnership for Youth Development program, throws waste into a Dumpster Friday at the Lincoln Crossing construction site on Lincoln Avenue in Pasadena.

Construction program builds futures for teens

BY ELISE KLEEMAN
STAFF WRITER

ALTADENA — Not everyone is in agreement about the progress of Lincoln Crossing. The architect and developer are still battling between themselves about the design, and some local residents are also at odds.

One thing that everyone has agreed on, though, is that community leaders have had great success in finding jobs for Altadena residents, both in construction and in the newly erected businesses.

It's not just the adults that are reaping the rewards. For three hours every day after school and three more on Saturdays, a band of high school kids don hard hats and steel-toed boots and get to work sweeping, scrapping, sanding, and putting things in order.

"I'm getting paid — keeps me looking good for all the girls," said Scott Escoe, a 12th grader at John Muir High School, who has been working on the site for five months.

The pay isn't much — \$7 an hour — but the benefits go beyond the money.

"We are really seriously trying to build some real men here," said Tecumseh Shackelford, a retired light equipment operator for the city of Los Angeles.

Shackelford — "Shack" to the teens and many others who know him — is the tireless force behind a movement to get younger members of this mostly minority community off to a good start.

His efforts go well beyond the job site.

Each of the eight boys working at Lincoln Crossing signed a contract that they would maintain a C grade point average or risk losing their jobs. Shackelford also arranged a series of extra classes he requires them to take.

Every Saturday morning, they return to school at John Muir where the head janitor teaches them about working in maintenance — from buffing floors to which cleaning chemicals not to mix.

'I learned you have to be responsible, that's the most important thing.'

*Jorge Meza,
John Muir High School senior*

In addition, every second Thursday they learn general employment skills like the significance of a good handshake, how to fill out a job application, and respect for an employer's property.

"I had to start teaching them how to work together, how to come to work every day, how to call when they can't come to work," Shackelford said of the boys when they first started.

He's since recruited Cheryl Walters of the non-profit organization Friends It Is to lead the classes.

"I learned you have to be responsible, that's the most important thing," said John Muir senior Jorge Meza.

"I think it's good because you're more competitive," said 10th grader Ishmael Bracy about applying for jobs. "You learn what to do and what not to do."

These students are only a small subset of many teenagers that Shackelford works with — including the 60 John Muir boys in the mentoring program he chairs.

The program, Mentoring & Partnership for Youth Development, matches each teen with an adult in the community. It also provides daily speakers at lunch time, free tutoring, and monthly fieldtrips, pancake breakfasts and round-table lunches that emphasize job opportunities, personal responsibility, and self-respect.

In turn, the student's respect for Shackelford runs deep. Whenever he talks, they listen, and suggestions he makes are heeded without question.

"The best [part of the program] is working with Shack," Escoe said.

"It doesn't matter where you come from," Meza said. "If you're rich or poor, you can do whatever you want — like Shack."

This Friday night at the job site, though, thoughts were on much more pressing matters: finishing work, rushing home to shower, and heading out for some fun.

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CLEANUP CREW: Teen workers Justin Wallace, left, and Scott Escoe, both 17, employed through the Mentoring and Partnership for Youth Development program, sweep a grocery store in the Lincoln Crossing construction site on Lincoln Avenue in Pasadena on Friday.