

Is There a Green Collar Job in Your Future?

BY BURT WETANSON

With recession clouds darkening the economy, it's a relief to report a ray of sunshine on the employment horizon. It's the Green Revolution (or Go Green movement), a growing sector of our economy that has the potential to create both near-term jobs and future, for those entering the workforce and for experienced workers.

The Go Green movement is the nation's response to another set of challenges — our environmental and energy problems. The more aggressively we attack pollution, reverse global warming, ease our dependence on oil, and find alternative and clean sources of energy, the more "green collar" jobs we stand to create, making the Green Revolution an important job engine just when we need jobs the most.

With the movement getting strong support from national and local leaders — and billions of dollars slated for investment and job training — let's take a look at what Go Green means to working people who are riding out the current downturn.

Turning Sunshine Into Power

When the experts and media speak of green industry and jobs, what they often have in mind is solar energy. For years we've dreamed of converting the light that pours down from the sun into electricity for our homes, businesses and communities. Now we have the technology to do just that, and that means jobs.

When the solar energy industry employs people to manufacture solar cells and panels, and the multitude of other products and materials needed to turn solar energy into kilowatts, jobs are created to install and maintain solar energy systems and equipment. And even more jobs are created for assistants, managers, accountants and security workers — the support personnel required by any business.

But the Green Revolution is much bigger than solar power. Clean fuels and technologies are gradually replacing traditional fuels. Homes and businesses need to be weatherized and made energy efficient. The nation's antiquated electrical grid cries out to be modernized. The rising demand for green collar workers trained for green occupations is, in turn, creating an urgent need for green collar job training. We'll discuss more about that later.

Political Support for Green

Lucky for all of us, the Go Green movement has

strong support at the top. While on the campaign trail, Barack Obama, faced with recession and high unemployment, saw the movement to green power as a job creator and announced his belief in green industries and job training as a significant way to fight job loss. Back in November 2008, he spoke of investing \$15 billion a year over the next decade to create five million new green jobs.

President Obama continues to back the green sector as an important way to rebuild and stimulate the economy. Under his green jobs plan, he plans to promote energy from the sun, wind and other renewable sources as well as energy conservation. He has spoken of tax credits and loan guarantees to clean energy companies, and his economic stimulus package includes billions of dollars for green industry and training.

Roughly how many jobs are we talking about? *BusinessWeek* magazine estimated that the "current 8.5 million U.S. jobs in renewable energy and energy efficiency industries could grow to as many as 40 million by 2030."

Here at home, Mayor Villaraigosa and other local leaders are also enthusiastic supporters of the Go Green movement for Los Angeles. As a major sunbelt city, L.A. has ambitious plans to use alternative power in the city's buildings and to offer incentives to companies that use energy-efficient construction practices and materials — which promises more jobs for green-trained residents.

Training for Green Jobs

One local institution responding to the call for vocational job training for the region's "green collar workforce" is the [Los Angeles Community College District](#).

LACCD is known to the citizens of Los Angeles as a provider of high-quality vocational technical training. As the largest community college district in the world, it has nine colleges under its umbrella — L.A. Mission College, Pierce College, L.A. Valley College, L.A. City College, East L.A. College, West L.A. College, L.A. Trade-Technical College, L.A. Southwest College and L.A. Harbor College.

At the forefront of LACCD's Green Jobs Initiative is [L.A. Trade-Tech College](#). In an exclusive interview, Marcy Drummond, vice president of Workforce and Economic Development, outlined the green training L.A. Trade-Tech offers today and is developing for the

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future.

“Right now we have 52 green-integrated courses and four green-related degree and certificate programs in career-technical, science, health and liberal arts programs,” she said. “Our green-related courses and programs range from alternative fuels and emission reduction in the Diesel Technology Program to a Supply Water Technology AS degree with an emphasis in water purification. We’re also planning a Green Business Certification Program.

“The most immediate jobs will, of course, be in the solar installation field,” Marcy continued. “Most of the energy companies in the Los Angeles area have significant goals in solar. The next most promising jobs for job creation and training are in energy efficiency and energy management. Projects like the weatherization of homes, companies and factories, also energy efficiency jobs that will be done by building and facilities managers. Right now we offer energy efficiency as part of our program for heating and ventilation technicians.”

L.A. Trade-Tech is in the process of developing short-term certificate programs for people who already have heating and ventilation experience but are not familiar with the green part of it. “When you come out of our two-year program,” Marcy said, “you’ll know the latest in the green technology.”

On its own campuses, LACCD is putting its money where its mouth is by investing \$2.2 billion on “building green” construction and modernization programs, projects that will offer L.A. residents high-wage, high-skill jobs for the 21st century.

“We want to be a leader in green workforce development,” Marcy said. “Our plan is to take full advantage of President Obama’s stimulus package as well as the earlier Green Jobs Act. We want to develop a training program for short-term as well as long-term jobs and occupations that will employ the new green collar workforce.”

A Heavyweight Alliance

Another force for local green development is the [Los Angeles Apollo Alliance Green Jobs Initiative](#), a coalition

of business, labor and environmental groups that champions green employment. (It takes its name from the Apollo space program, which put a man on the moon.)

One of the main goals of the Alliance is energy independence for the U.S. It sees clean green industries as a way to rebuild U.S. manufacturing and lessen the nation’s dependence on foreign oil while developing cleaner and more efficient energy alternatives. Its allies are drawn from businesses, environmental organizations and over 30 labor unions, and it is leading the charge to make sure California and Los Angeles get their share of stimulus dollars.

When asked to define a green job, Alliance Chairman Phil Angelides said, “It has to pay decent wages and benefits that can support a family. It has to be part of a real career path, with upward mobility. And it needs to reduce waste and pollution and benefit the environment.”

Green collar workers will include solar and wind energy engineers and installers, green business owners, and vocational and trade workers such as electricians who install solar panels, plumbers who install solar water heaters, workers who weatherize buildings, and construction workers who build energy-efficient buildings and wind power farms.

One local resource of particular interest to the Alliance is the [Port of Los Angeles](#). It supported California Bill AB2855, passed in October 2008, which will train high school students in green building and goods movement for occupational areas relating to the greening of ports. If it succeeds, it is expected to generate at least 72,000 permanent jobs related to the port in L.A.

The Green Revolution is shaping up as a job engine and a path to economic recovery both now and in the future. It hopes to do all of this by creating an industry — and a workforce — capable of tackling America’s environmental problems.

Burt Wetanson is a freelance writer who has contributed over 60 articles to Working World. His goal: “to give readers practical tools for success in the tough L.A. career market.”

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