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A 'Welcome' development at KCC - Popular Hospitality & Tourism curriculum exceeds expectations

By Helen Klein

With an eye toward the city's burgeoning tourism and hospitality industries, one local college has developed a program to help train adults for career-track jobs.

Indeed, a year after the launch of the program, Project Welcome, Kingsborough Community College (KCC) is reporting success above and beyond what was initially predicted, opening the door to potential success for those just beginning their work careers as well as those making mid-life career changes.

Stuart Schulman, the director of KCC's Center for Economic and Workforce Development, said that Project Welcome – which had been established thanks to a \$1.7 million grant from the United States Department of Labor – had exceeded the federal requirements as far as the number of people trained is concerned.



Students in Kingsborough Community College's Project Welcome are training to take advantage of the growth in tourism and hospitality industries in New York City.

In addition, Schulman said that the program — which centers on a 280-hour, 10 week course — had also exceeded its goals in terms of placement. In all, he explained, the federal grant required that, over three years, a total of 520 people be trained to get career-track jobs in the targeted industries, with the training of 120 people the first year's goal.

In fact, "At the conclusion of the first year," Schulman said, "we have trained close to 200 people, so we have gone way over the prediction, and we have placed well over 120 people."

The students in the program get "not only classroom training but also receive professional certification from the relevant certification agencies," Schulman added. The net result: "We are able to provide a qualified workforce."

One of the goals of the project is to make it easy for those interested in tourism and hospitality careers to get the training they need. As a result, Schulman said, classes are held both at KCC's Oriental Boulevard campus and at local community-based organizations participating in the effort, including Astella Development in Coney Island, East New York Works, Williamsburg Works and Opportunities for a Better Tomorrow in Sunset Park and Bushwick.

In addition, KCC is just completing the development of its cyber-hotel, said Schulman, that would allow students to participate in distance learning.

The areas of hospitality and tourism were selected for the program because of their potential for growth, Schulman said.

How much growth? Julian Alssid, the executive director of the not-for-profit Workforce Strategy Center, which undertook a study on KCC's behalf, said that, between 2007 and 2012, the industries are projected "to grow by nearly 10 percent, from 565,000 jobs today to about 620,000 jobs in five years."

Many of these jobs, Alssid added, "Are good career-track jobs. There is a whole range of excellent jobs."

The opportunity to develop Project Welcome was, said Schulman, "The right thing at the right time. The city, this year, has hosted a record number of visitors, closing in on the 46 million mark. There's been a tremendous spike in visitation, a tremendous spike in revenue, a tremendous spike in hotel occupancy, even with the opening of new hotels. And, it's not just a Manhattan boom. It's spreading slowly to the boroughs, and Brooklyn is preeminent in this."

The program is not just about entry level jobs, Schulman added. Rather, the goal, according to material provided by KCC, is to place graduates in jobs paying between \$14 and \$16 an hour that could lead to other, more highly remunerative positions. Thus, KCC had asked the Workforce Strategy Center to map "legitimate career pathways in the hospitality, tourism and food serve industries," Schulman said.

These pathways, Schulman added, "Show someone what the various levels of jobs or careers exist" in the industries, "ranked hierarchically by zip code, projected job growth, wages, education level."

In seeking this sort of career mapping, KCC is on the cutting edge, said Alssid. "In traditional job training," he explained, "colleges and training organizations develop jobs without really knowing what the jobs are. The traditional approach is not about getting people careers."

In contrast, KCC, he said, "Asked us to take a purposeful look at the industry, to determine what the good jobs are, and think how they can apply this to their program, to help move people onto good career tracks in hospitality and tourism. They are hoping they will be able to use the data to better serve students in Brooklyn."

In addition, Alssid said, "They are hoping the data will serve as an intelligent basis for discussion with employers. The beneficiaries will be especially lower-income people in Brooklyn who otherwise might not get the direction they need. It's an approach to helping people get out of poverty."

KCC was one of 72 awardees nationwide to receive the Department of Labor grant. Project Welcome, according to Schulman, was the only tourism and hospitality project that was funded, and the only program in New York State to receive the grant. In addition to the federal grant, KCC also received \$210,000 from the city's Department of Small Business Services (SBS) to support tuition costs for students.

Besides hospitality and tourism, the Workforce Strategy Center studied three other industries for KCC: Non-nursing health care, retail and maritime.