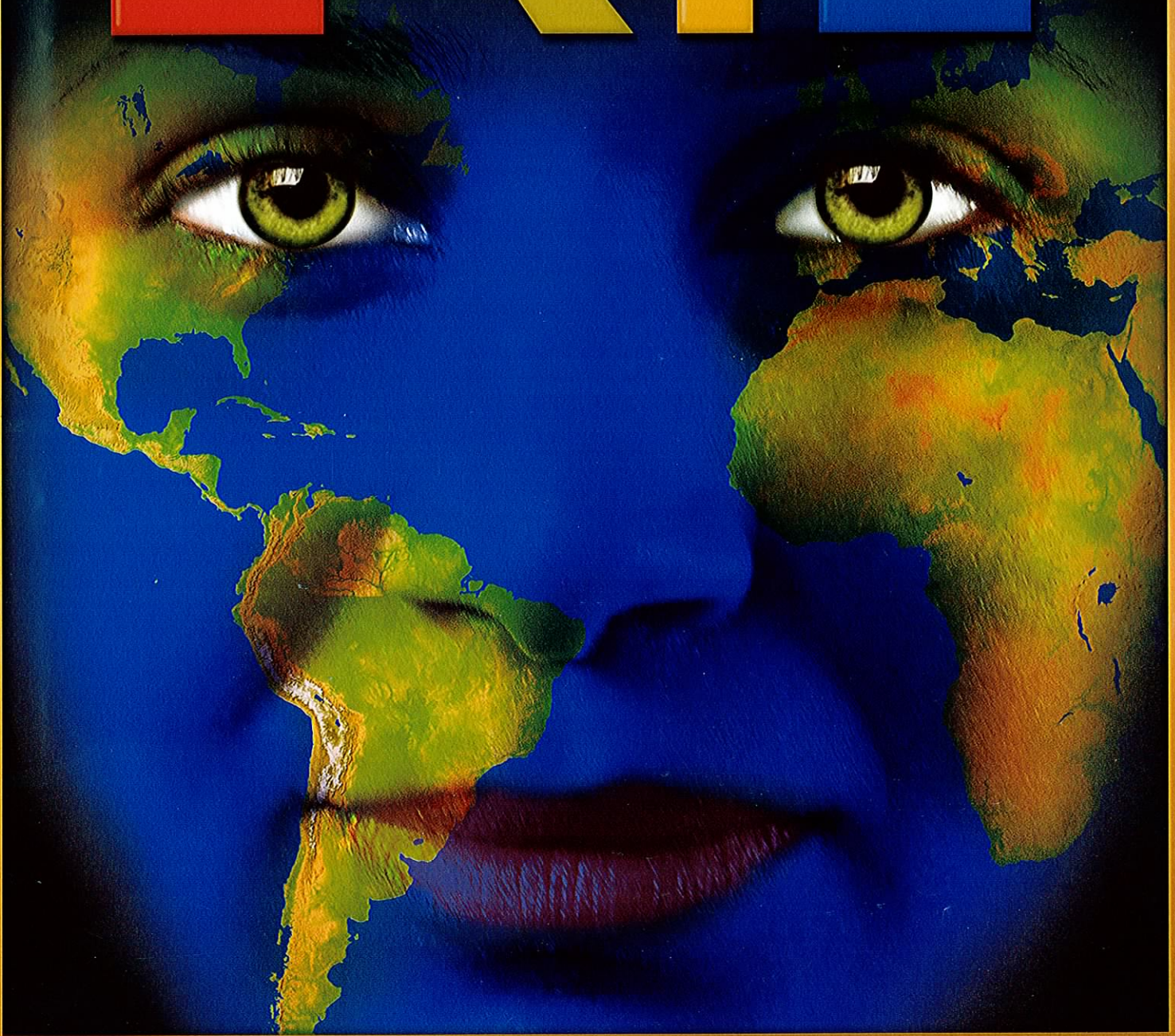


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Refugees Enhance Erie's Economy and Quality of Life

by Susan M. Weiner



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We look forward to seeing you at these networking events for Chamber investors.



August 18
5:00 – 7:00 p.m.
The JET-TV 24 & FOX 66 Stations
8455 Peach Street



September 15
5:00 – 7:00 p.m.
Huntington Bank
At the Sheraton Erie Bayfront Hotel
55 West Bay Drive



October 20
5:00 – 7:00 p.m.
Quality Inn & Suites
8040 Perry Highway

Please RSVP to the Chamber at (814) 454-7191 x 146 or cnoble@eriepa.com



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Diverse Projects Bring Diverse Workforce

Interview with Dan Harmon, Great Lakes Building and Construction Trades Council and Matt McLaughlin, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers

| By Erika Howland

Over the past decade a great deal of progress has been made in the efforts to include minority workers in local projects. But community leaders agree there is still a great deal of work to be done. That's why local unions are teaming up with area workforce development agencies to make sure the buildings we build in our community are representative of the people who will visit them. "I think it gets better all of the time," says Matt McLaughlin, Business Manager of the IBEW Local Union 56 which represents area electricians. "The unions do better than anyone else but we still have to continue to push forward for more diversification. Right now our minority membership is still under 10 percent with a little over 300 members."

In recent years, some major construction and renovation projects including the Bayfront Convention Center, UPMC Hamot Women's Hospital, Saint Vincent Health System, and Presque Isle Downs & Casino have generated a need for hundreds of workers in our community. Union leaders say they have worked closely with the Erie County Convention Center Authority and other businesses to make sure the workforce on those projects is open to everyone. "We aim for at least 10 percent of the workforce on these big projects to be minority workers," according to McLaughlin. "On the Sheraton Hotel project for example, we maintained roughly 9.8 percent."

The bigger project remains finding the qualified workers to satisfy these standards. It's a task the unions aren't taking lightly. "The population of the workforce should reflect the general population," says Dan Harmon, President & Business Manager of Great Lakes Building and Construction Trades

Council. "These are good jobs and good opportunities. Most people don't realize the future they can have at this trade." But union leaders recognize minority inclusion in the local workforce is a team effort.

That's why local organizations like the Urban Erie Community Development Corporation, Ben Franklin Technology Partners, Preferred Systems, and the Erie Community Foundation are trying to spread the word about the benefits of getting into a construction trade apprenticeship program and its employment opportunities. "It's difficult to find people to get involved and commit to five years of training," explains McLaughlin. "We try to put our name out there and let people know we are looking for young people and motivated people willing to go to work. However, it seems people want to go to college and don't see the benefits of our trade."

With the help of these various agencies, it has made these efforts a little easier. Job fairs have been held to recruit workers. Additionally, other agencies have stepped up and paid application fees and helped screen interested workers to ensure they meet the minimum requirements for the apprenticeship program or other employment. The apprenticeship program is for people interested in learning a trade, such as becoming an electrician. The five year commitment to the program offers more than 8,000 hours of on-the-job and classroom training. As union members, those workers who go through the apprenticeship program continue to receive additional training and education throughout their career keeping them at the top of their game.

◀ Photo Courtesy of G.L.B.T.

Diverse Projects continued.

Gary Horton, of the UECDL is pleased progress is being made, but hopes to see more progress in the future. "Everyone needs to feel that inclusion is important," explains Horton. "We have 25 percent minority population in the City of Erie. We are a better community when diversity is represented and everyone is included. "With Horton's help, union leaders have reached out to local community groups like the Martin Luther King Center and the Booker T. Washington Center as well the trade schools, church groups and PA Career Link. "You have to work with everybody to get your information out there," says McLaughlin. "We can only do so much with the funding we have, so it takes a lot of self-promotion and community support."

According to the union leaders and local agencies a lot of help has come by way of the Erie County Convention Center Authority making a commitment towards inclusion. "It starts at the top with ownership and those people bidding out the projects," says Horton. "If they all followed the Convention Center Authority's model, we would have less minority unemployment." Later this year, work is expected to begin on the \$42 million Tullio Arena renovation project. Authority officials are already requesting at least a ten percent minority workforce rate as the project awaits new bids. "We've certainly come a long way in the past ten years," remarks Harmon. "But what's paralleled the success of this mission is the project labor agreements and the cooperation among all of the organizations involved." Both Harmon and

Horton credit the ECCCA's efforts in getting dozens of minority workers on the job site for both the Bayfront Convention Center and Sheraton Hotel projects. "There's been no greater opportunity for minority inclusion than on these projects," says Horton. "These projects employed 75 minority workers, helping them to earn over \$900,000."

"It only makes sense to change along with the world," says McLaughlin. "It's a good thing."

Union leaders are hoping in the coming years more community groups and organizations will come on board with minority recruitment as they remain committed to their cause. It's an effort they say requires activity all year long if our community intends to stay in tune with an ever-changing society. "It only makes sense to change along with the world," says McLaughlin. "It's a good thing. You lose the stereotypes when you become more diverse and you gain so much more. You learn so much more. How can you move the community forward if the same group of people always have the good jobs? We must uplift the entire community not just a portion of it." ■

