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LIUNA and Sierra Club Join Together as Local Green Jobs Training Program Graduates First Seattle-Area Weatherization Class

Mayor's Office Announces New Weatherization Jobs Program for Graduates

Seattle, WA (November 5, 2009) – LIUNA – the Laborers' International Union of North America – today graduated the first class of skilled weatherization workers to complete a weatherization training program in the Seattle area. The 19 new graduates completed a challenging two-week training program where they learned general construction skills in addition to core weatherization competencies, such as caulking, insulating and duct sealing.

LIUNA has designed a breakthrough national program to train thousands of workers across the country to do skilled weatherization work, retrofitting energy inefficient homes. The effort, already underway in a number of states, will put people back to work in local communities while reducing energy bills for millions of families and helping the environment.

“The skilled and credentialed weatherization workers LIUNA is graduating today will set the standard for a new American industry, said LIUNA Vice President and Northwest Regional Manager Mano Frey. “These workers are ready to retrofit the more than one thousand poorly insulated homes in our area and help families save money on their energy bills. At the same time, they are opening doors to career paths with family-supporting jobs and opportunities for advancement.”

The LIUNA graduates were joined by representatives from the Sierra Club, Puget Sound Sage, Climate Solutions and City Council President Richard Conlin. Ten of the graduates are from LIUNA Locals 242 and nine were unemployed young adults of color from low-income urban neighborhoods, recruited by the Got Green Project. Got Green is a community-based project led by young men and women of color to raise awareness in their communities about the benefits and opportunities resulting from green job sectors.

“At a time when I see a lot of people in my community in need of a paycheck, LIUNA’s training program is giving me the tools I need to start a career,” said Ahmalik Claiborne, the trainee earning the highest evaluation in the class. “I have been homeless and struggling to support myself, now I feel like I’ve taken charge of my future. I have a career and I can build a better community.”

Sheila White of weatherization contractor NW Green has made a commitment to hire from the group of new graduates.

Before the graduation, Mike Mann, Director of the City of Seattle’s Office of Sustainability and Environment announced the City’s new plan to ensure that weatherization trainees will find jobs. The City will require 75 percent of workers hired by contractors in the Weatherization Assistance Program to be from programs meeting the LIUNA’s training standards and that a majority of new trainees must be from disadvantaged communities or veterans. The new hiring requirements will be in place for graduates to begin retrofitting Seattle homes as early as December 1st.

“The Mayor’s new program to connect at-risk youth to weatherization jobs is a model for the State and the Northwest,” said Howard Greenwich, Research Director of Puget Sound Sage, who worked with the City to come up with the plan.

The coalition of labor, environmental and community organizations attending the graduation joined forces urging Seattle’s Mayor-elect to continue Mayor Nickel’s program creating good jobs for Seattle area workers.

Weatherization can reduce a home’s energy use by as much as 40 percent and cut energy bills by \$21 billion annually – an estimated average annual savings of \$350 per homeowner. By retrofitting energy inefficient homes, America can lower residential greenhouse gas emission by 60 million metric tons annually by 2020. Every million homes weatherized supports 78,000 jobs. The U.S. Department of Energy estimates a \$2.73 return in benefits for each \$1 invested in weatherization.

“Investing in building efficiency will ensure a cleaner, healthier environment for future generations,” said Sierra Club representative Morgan Ahouse. “Weatherization is a win-win no matter how you look at it. It’s a smart choice for our environment that creates good jobs and saves people money on their energy bills.”

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act invested \$5 billion to expand the Department of Energy’s Weatherization Assistance Program and meet the Obama Administration’s goal of weatherizing 1 million homes a year. This is a nearly 10-fold increase in the amount typically invested in weatherizing poorly insulated homes, but it is still not enough to fix all of the nation’s energy inefficient homes. DOE recently announced that it will be allocating more than \$400 million in competitive energy efficiency grants, which could help fund weatherization projects in cities like Seattle and around the country. LIUNA is working with partners, such as the Sierra Club, to help close the remaining weatherization investment gap and identify ways to ramp up both public and private investment in America’s weatherization industry, including “pay-as-you-save” models, utility partnerships, bonds and pension fund investments.

LIUNA’s weatherization training program will help meet the demand for the tens of thousands of skilled workers needed to weatherize America. LIUNA’s training program exceeds Department of Energy’s weatherization assistance program standards and relies on experienced instructors who provide trainees with a broad set of weatherization and construction skills and credentials as Technicians/Installers, Weatherization Supervisors and Energy Auditors.

For more information on LIUNA’s weatherization training program please visit <http://www.liunabuildsamerica.org/weatherize>.

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The half million members of LIUNA – the Laborers’ International Union of North America – are on the forefront of the construction industry, a powerhouse of workers who are proud to build America.