

## SUMMIT ACADEMY HELPS PROJECT MEET MINORITY WORKFORCE GOALS, ONE HARD HAT AT A TIME



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At age 37, Joe Cochran was tired of working dead-end jobs. With two daughters depending on him, he knew it was time to get serious about his life. But Cochran also realized there was little demand for a career delivery driver with a very limited skill set. "I didn't know what to do or where to turn," Cochran says. "But I was determined to do something different." With a ton of interest but not an ounce of construction experience, Cochran enrolled in Summit Academy's *100 Hard Hats* program, an intense 20-week course that trains men and women in the construction trades, including carpentry, plumbing and electrical work.

Over the past five years, the *100 Hard Hats* program has graduated more than 300 students and has achieved an impressive job placement rate of 75%. The average student is between 26 and 30 with one or more children, and has an annual income of only \$5,600. A large majority are black men. Graduates earn an average of \$16.64 an hour but have the potential to earn much more.

Alex Tittle, Summit Academy's Support Services Manager, says teaching students top-notch technical skills and adjusting their attitudes are the keys to the program's success. "The goal is to make students more marketable," explains Tittle, a former Army Captain. "The bottom line is to get them a job. The best social service program in the world is a job."

### Filling the Ballpark's Crews

Now, thanks to an active collaboration with the ballpark's Construction Manager, Mortenson Construction, the program's graduates are hard at work helping to build the new ballpark. Among them is Joe Cochran, who was hired by Mortenson as a carpenter's apprentice in August 2007, two days before graduation. "I love this job," he says. "It gives me great pride to work on something this big."

Cochran is one of a dozen Summit Academy graduates working on the ballpark project, and one of an increasing number of minority workers hired in recent months by Mortenson. With the support of Summit Academy and other referral organizations—including the Construction Careers Coalition, Merrick and the St. Paul College—Mortenson has continued to make steady progress toward the ballpark's goal of 25% minority workforce participation. Participation rates have jumped from 13% to 22% since the end of 2007, reaching 28% in both May and June. Mortenson Construction Executive Dan Mehls says that, Mortenson anticipates reaching the 25% goal by the second quarter of 2009.

Mortenson's progress reflects a company-wide effort that starts at the very top. Recently, Mortenson Senior Vice President John Wood,



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Twins President Jerry Bell and MBA Chair Steve Cramer met with Summit Academy's President and CEO Louis King at the Minneapolis Urban League to discuss the status of hiring minority workers. Mortenson will also be meeting monthly with community leaders to provide project updates, share its plan to reach the project workforce goals, and demonstrate how it will connect Summit Academy to its subcontractors so that

more graduates are interviewed for positions on those construction crews. “We’ve been very impressed by the commitment Mortenson has shown to reach our project workforce goals,” says Minnesota Ballpark Authority (MBA) Chair Steve Cramer. “Mortenson has recently taken several proactive steps to reach out to our community partners, and these efforts are clearly making a difference.”

According to Dan Mehls, building upon its longstanding partnership with Summit Academy and tapping into successful programs like 100 Hard Hats has been a key part of Mortenson’s strategy. “Mortenson has enjoyed a strong working relationship with Summit Academy for many years,” Mehls explains. “However, this relationship has elevated to a much higher level with the workforce needs generated by the TCF Stadium and especially the Twins Ballpark Project.”

In addition to developing a placement program for graduates, Mortenson representatives have toured Summit Academy to learn more about its curriculum and to offer suggestions on how the trainers could tailor their programs to better match the ballpark’s specific needs. Mortenson also invited a group of Summit Academy trainers to tour the ballpark site so that they could gain a firsthand perspective on the project’s challenges. Trainers have since adjusted their concrete and framing courses to reflect the project’s scale and commercial nature, better readying graduates for jobs on ballpark construction crews.

As for Joe Cochran, he couldn’t be more enthusiastic about the benefits of this collaboration. With a stable job, a steady paycheck and newfound skills that provide his family with financial security, Cochran isn’t shy about sharing his success story. He often speaks to students at Summit Academy about the program’s potential to change lives. He tells them he wouldn’t be building the ballpark without the strong foundation he received from the *100 Hard Hats* trainers.

“I know what they’re thinking,” Cochran says about the students. “I want to get out of here and start working.’ I did too, but there’s a reason it takes 20 weeks to learn what they teach. And the wait is worth it. Look at me. I’m living proof. I’m an example something good really can happen.”