



**TWO TINY HOUSES** Built by ACAD students, minimalist living takes center stage at the Vacant to Vibrant DC event.

## STUDENT-BUILT TINY HOUSE PROJECT IN WARD 7 DELIVERS ON DIVERSE, AFFORDABLE LIVING OPTIONS

Amid late morning showers, students of the Academy of Construction and Design (ACAD) at IDEA Public Charter School hovered under umbrellas on a vacant lot in the 1100 block of 50th Place in Northeast Washington, D.C. With them, stood the head of the D.C. Department of Housing and Community Development.

By *Arnesa A. Howell*

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## MAKING STRIDES: JOBS COALITION ACCOMPLISHMENTS



While raising awareness of workforce challenges and potential barriers to employment, the JOBS Coalition and its members have combined their resources and industry expertise to achieve the following results:

- Built the Bellevue Resource Center, a program facility serving the hard-to-reach, hard-to-employ, and returning ex-offender populations. The Center was completed on September 30, 2003.
- Guided the creation of the Construction & Design Academy at Cardozo, providing District students access, training, and preparation for careers in the construction industry and trades after graduation. The Academy officially opened in September 2005. □



**LIFT & LOAD** (clockwise) Each pre-apprentice steadies the beam, then balances it on one shoulder to transport and build scaffolding.

## PRE-APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM BOLSTERS WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT, HELPS MILLER & LONG DISCOVER 'BEST OF THE BEST'

Miller & Long Concrete Construction has a long-standing commitment to workforce development and training through its existing pre-apprenticeship programs. It recently added to its efforts to expand the pool of qualified laborers in the construction industry through a program supported by the Department of Employment Services. In Part I of a two-part series, *JOB COALITION PATHWAYS* highlights the bootcamp training component of this 12-week pre-apprenticeship program and how it helps prepare those new to the construction field for future career success.

By *Arnesa A. Howell*

It's an overcast fall morning at "The Yard," Miller & Long's 22-acre maintenance and storage facility in Prince George's County that unassumingly rests alongside a narrow stretch of Westphalia Road. Despite steady showers, a small team of laborers-in-training braves the weather to make its way to the grounds, where there are stacks of metal beams. The group of eight — seven men and one woman — are wearing powder blue hardhats, neon yellow safety vests, work gloves and heavy-duty work boots, well-suited for the rain slicked concrete.

One-by-one, each person steps up to a beam and conducts the balance test. Then, hoists an 82- to 94-pound beam, over one shoulder —

with team members spotting for safety.

"Spinning, spinning, heads up," announces one young man, as two instructors carefully watch nearby. After moving the beams, or 21s, the group transitions to the next project: building scaffolding.

At Miller & Long, a company that has long provided its own pre-apprenticeship training for the hard-to-employ, training bootcamps like this are the first stop for construction trade newcomers to gain crucial hands-on experience before transitioning into the field. It's the same path started months earlier by a separate class, one that is part of a 12-week pre-apprenticeship program by Miller & Long with support

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Polly Donaldson, director, DHCD.

**Tiny House Reveal** *Continued from page 1*

“Let’s do a countdown,” said Polly Donaldson, the agency’s director. “Five, four, three, two, one.”

The crowd chanted in unison as students rolled back oversized billboards, revealing two tiny homes built by ACAD high school students and causing one woman in the audience to gasp, “Oh my gosh.”

The Sept. 24 unveiling marked a transformative moment for both students and the District, which as part of the mayor’s Vacant to Vibrant DC initiative launched in December 2017, seeks to convert vacant and blighted spaces to areas of productive use for residents in neighborhoods across the city. The tiny house demonstration and community education project is one prong of a five-pronged approach.

“We saw the opportunity with the school to be able to do tiny homes on this site,” Donaldson told *JOBS Coalition Pathways* after the reveal. For the young people, she added, this is a “wonderful way to combine real-life, real-skill experience” that translates into a tangible, finished project.

Noting that other cities have embraced tiny home communities for seniors and other populations, she noted the importance of a growing city like the District exploring all avenues when it comes to housing affordability. “It’s going to take many housing options in the future to make D.C. affordable for all, which is what Mayor [Muriel] Bowser would like to see,” Donaldson said. “Because the housing needs of our residents are so diverse, so are our housing efforts.”

**Tiny House, Big (Student) Impact**

ACAD students started building the first tiny house — a 160 square-foot “micro” dwelling — in the spring of 2015, as part of an effort to provide students with opportunities to sharpen technical skills and apply OSHA training (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) learned in the classroom in the field. By January 2017, students began work on the 242-square-foot “Minim” house. Each home offers unique amenities and space-saving features, from a rain-water collection system and composting toilets to a sleeping loft and kitchenette.

Karlton Carroll, for one, knows the hard work and big effort that goes into constructing a tiny house from the beginning. “It was

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**REAL TALK** Graduate Dontrell Deaner (foreground) soaks in life and work advice during the last pre-apprenticeship classroom session.



**M&L Pre-Apprenticeship** *Continued from page 1*

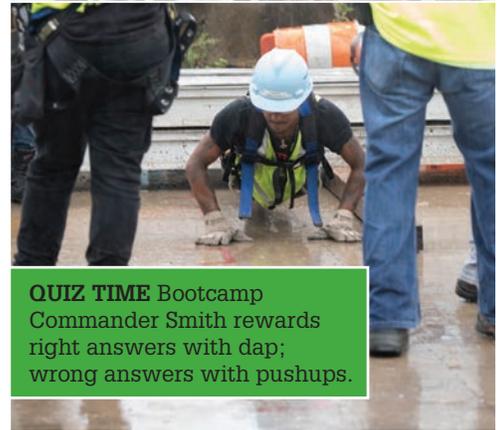
from the Department of Employment Services. That inaugural class graduated on September 30, the end date of the program.

“Workforce development and training is for the common good of the community,” says Otto Girr, vice president of Human Resources at Miller & Long. “We are helping to strengthen employment opportunities through outreach to areas of the city with high unemployment where residents are most in need, including those fresh out of prison who have a hard time finding a career path.”

According to a Request for Applications (RFA) earlier this year, the DOES Office of Workforce Development announced it would be seeking applications for a maximum \$150,000 grant for “organizations to develop and implement a comprehensive pre-apprenticeship program that features work-based job training for residents ages 18 years or older” in an effort “to expand innovative programming and meet the demands of District residents.”

The pre-apprenticeship program starts with a two-week bootcamp and continues with 10 weeks of immersive, on-the-job training with trainees dispersed to three different sites across Tysons Corner, Virginia, Washington, D.C., and Bethesda, Maryland. The program also incorporates safety and professional development classroom trainings, covering topics ranging from conflict resolution to budgeting and other money matters. The goal? To help participants “stay employed and avoid pitfalls,” says Girr.

“The objective was to make sure we have



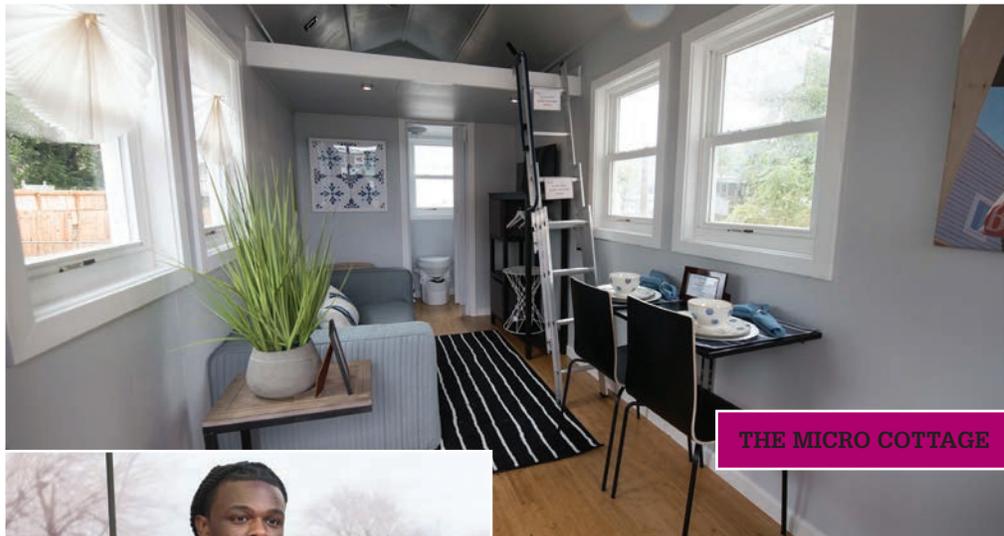
**QUIZ TIME** Bootcamp Commander Smith rewards right answers with dap; wrong answers with pushups.

a group of pre-apprentices that are given all the tools and training necessary to help them succeed to create a career in construction,” adds Romina Byrd, the company’s director of education and training.

**First Stop, ‘The Yard’**

Miller & Long hired 28 students to start as pre-apprentices, their journey beginning with 7 a.m. calls to The Yard. There, trainers William “Moe” Smith and Stanley Spencer teach “the basics” needed to survive on the job as laborers, like building scaffolding, carrying 21s, learning the names of and identifying construction tools and materials — all with safety in mind.

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THE MICRO COTTAGE



**PUTTING IN WORK** Student Karlton Carroll shares that he valued the teamwork in building both tiny houses.

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tiring but then it became fun,” admitted Carroll, 17, a senior at IDEA PCS enrolled in ACAD. “The tiring part was the cutting [of wood] because you had to measure to cut, and the fun part was putting the siding on both of the houses.” Working with a team of fellow classmates that he’s known since ninth grade, Carroll also helped

install windows and the interior walls, one of the hardest parts of the job because of the itchy insulation from the fiberglass particles. Each step in the construction process was built with love.

“That’s why I built the house as nice and perfect, because I feel as though my grandma could live here,” he shared. And his parents couldn’t be more proud.

“This can be a lifelong career or something that he can fall back on in the future. They did an awesome job!” said Carroll’s mom, Lakeisha Morton, who praised the program for teaching young people teamwork.

Looking ahead, Carroll plans to study computer technology and software in college. But the value of his technical education background, specifically carpentry, will always be there. “It’s a [Plan] B,” he said.

### Creating Innovative Spaces

For Shelly Karriem, director of the Academy of Construction and Design, each tiny house is a culmination of everything the students have learned from their instructors: construction technology, blueprint reading, math and science, as well as carpentry. And the benefits don’t stop there.

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### M&L Pre-Apprenticeship *Continued from page 2*

“Construction is a dangerous job, period,” stresses Smith, a senior carpenter foreman with Miller & Long, who is also the bootcamp’s “commander.” For participants, solid OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) training is key to ensuring safety for themselves and their peers. “We tell all our trainees and guys in the field, “The way you came to work with all your limbs is the same way we want you to go home,”” he says.

To reinforce a safety first mentality, Smith conducts on-the-spot quizzes. Between projects during the “military-style” sessions, he assembles students then fires off questions:

“Prior to being tied off, what is the rule? At what height do you have to be tied off?”

“Six feet,” a student responds.

“Six feet, my man,” Smith says with a smile, adding, “When your foot is getting ready to hit 6 feet, you better be tied off already.”

A correct answer is rewarded with positive reinforcement of dap. And a wrong answer reaps pushups.

Smith explains that the rigors of the bootcamp mentally and physically prepare trainees for what to expect on the job site so they can survive. Missing more than two days warrants dismissal from the program, and each participant must have the mental stamina to take the instructor “whooping and hollering” in his or her ear. “I’m not going to make it easy for you because it’s not going to be easy when you go into the field,” he says. “It’s fast-paced and you have to be able to [keep] up.”

### Facing Challenges Head On

According to Smith, communication is the biggest challenge facing those entering the field. In a diverse industry like construction, the presence of language barriers, as well as cultural stereotypes, can impact on-the-job performance.

That’s why it’s important to always be “an asset and stay in attack mode — because that’s gonna break the barrier right there,” asserts Smith.

For example, if a Spanish-speaking foreman gives instruction and it’s not understood, it’s important to say something upfront. “Don’t let him walk off thinking you understood him,” explains Smith, who advises getting ahead of the situation by asking the foreman to speak more slowly or by requesting a translator.

And while participants come from all walks of life, those who are formerly incarcerated can expect to gain more than a hands-on training experience. “I think we are positive role models because we are mentors,” Smith adds, noting that guidance extends to learning coping skills for everyday life. “This is an opportunity to make a difference, to now be productive citizens.”

### Upward and Onward

Dontrell Deaner knows this firsthand. In May 2018, he had just been released from prison after serving 10 years. “I went to prison when I was 18 years old. I caught a murder charge. I was a kid with no guidance and from a low poverty neighborhood growing up,” he shares.

Soonafter, through DOES, Deaner discovered the pre-apprenticeship program. The process moved quickly, with him checking out the program, snagging an interview and being accepted in less than a week. He credits the bootcamp for introducing him to the construction trades — an area that he readily admits “really not knowing nothing” about beforehand.

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## JOBS Coalition Pathways

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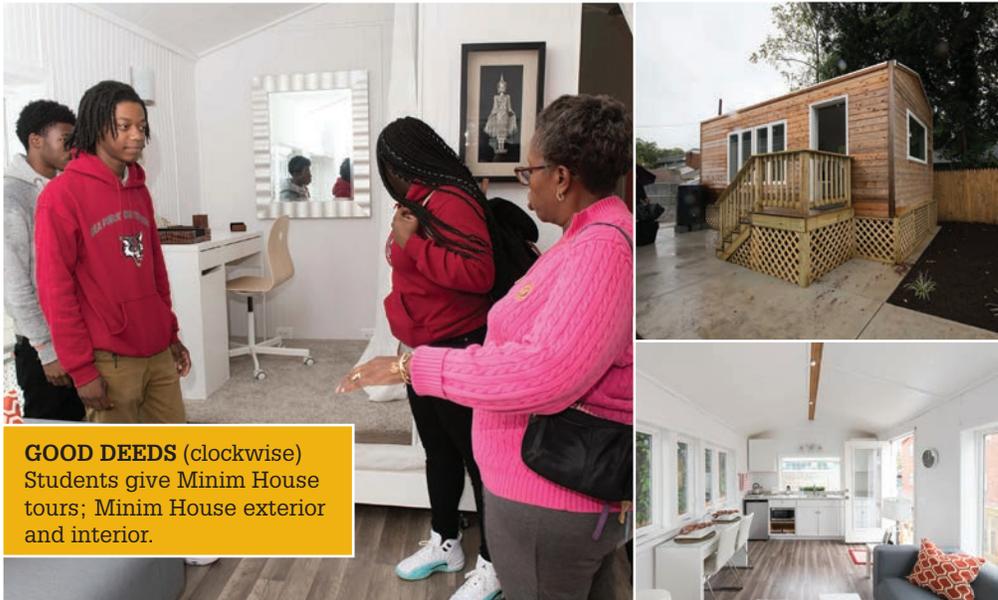
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**GOOD DEEDS** (clockwise) Students give Minim House tours; Minim House exterior and interior.

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“The Academy has a decade-plus track record of putting work- and college-bound students on viable paths to real careers,” Karriem told the crowd. “When graduates leave the Academy, they are able to show hiring managers and college admissions officials that they have already created something of lasting value in their community.”

This demonstration project is a step forward in that direction, introducing city residents to

the concept of living with a small environmental footprint. Said Donaldson, it will “give folks an idea of what a tiny home actually looks like.” □

*The event was a partnership between the D.C. Students Construction Trades Foundation, IDEA PCS, and the District government, including the Department of Housing and Community Development and Department of Energy and Environment.*

**M&L Pre-Apprenticeship** *Continued from page 3*

There, Deaner learned how to drive nails, build and take down scaffolding, and how to pick up construction materials properly — giving him an edge over some of his peers. “It really helped me when I went to the job site because certain things they had to teach new guys coming in, I already knew,” says Deaner, who’s been working at a site on Massachusetts Avenue in Northwest Washington, D.C.

With the door of opportunity open, he quickly points out, “I’m just ready to move forward.”

“For me having been incarcerated, any other job I get, it would be temporary, and I’d be stuck in one position,” Deaner continues. “With construction, I have an opportunity to move up. It’s in my hands and the more I learn, the more I improve myself.”

Indeed, there are a multitude of job opportunities, from engineer and carpenter to truck driver and fork lift operator. And “hustle and drive” can go a long way at Miller & Long, according to Spencer, assistant bootcamp commander and Yard foreman. While an unskilled laborer starts at \$16 an hour, a crane operator can earn upwards of \$55 an hour. Ultimately, says Spencer, “The sky is the limit.” □

*Read Part 2 in the Nov/Dec 2018 issue of the JOBS Coalition Pathways newsletter.*



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