

COVER 12/11/99

\$50,000 given to attract more Blacks to trade unions

by Christian MORROW
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Bearing a Christmas tree, an American flag, a broom symbolizing a job devoid of injuries and the signatures of more than 1,000 employees, the last steel beam was placed in the superstructure of Mellon Financial Corp.'s new Client Service Center.

However, Mellon officials "topped-off" the Dec. 8 ceremony by presenting a \$50,000 check to the Builders Guild to help attract more African-Americans to the construction trades.

The Builders Guild is a cooperative labor/management initiative formed two years ago to create jobs and bring new businesses to southwestern Pennsylvania.

John Turyan, chairman of the guild's advisory council, said its Minority Task Force will decide how to allocate the funds.

"Basically, it will be used to assist in recruitment efforts, to offset union enrollment fees and to support a speakers' bureau to educate minorities about careers in construction," he said.

Turyan said the construction boom in southwestern Pennsylvania will mean a chance to build a substantial career for anyone entering the building trades right now.

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"People look at the stadiums and think it's too late, but they're just the catalyst for what's going to happen," he said. "There's going to be somewhere around \$5 billion in construction projects here in the next five to seven years. We need to get people into the trades now so we can fill all the jobs."

Because of the anticipated length of the boom, Turyan expects to see a new generation of journeyman-level tradesmen created.

"It only takes four years on the job and in the classroom to be a journeyman. And depending on the trade, that can mean jobs paying \$20 an hour or more," he said.

Red Washington, Minority Task Force co-chairman, is glad to see Mellon's contribution. As liaison to the trade unions, he is one of the foot soldiers educating and recruiting youths in to the building trades.

"It's been a long time coming," he said. "Since April, I've recruited 62 new apprentices. This will certainly help with that effort. I'm happy to see it."

Because union membership requires a clean driving record and license, Washington would like to see some funds used to ease some of the transportation problems facing inner-city youths, such as paying license renewal and drivers education costs, and in some cases, delinquent fines.

Cheryl Walker, Minority Task Force member and community development coordinator for Community Builders, hopes the Mellon award will encourage other organizations to contribute to the fund.

"It's a great opportunity to move from discussions at the table, out to the minority communities," she said. "I want to make sure the funds go where they're intended because exposure to opportunity is half the battle."