

SPORTS

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# Oakland



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# LEARNING LIFE SKILLS

## Program helping locals become more productive

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OAKLAND

**S**TEPHON TAYLOR starts work early each morning, but he doesn't have to worry about traffic, the cost of a BART ticket or bus fare.

Taylor, 20, an apprentice electrician working for Rex Moore Electrical Contractors and Engineers, is one of a handful of local residents who are helping build a variety of residential developments within the large Central Station project in West Oakland — practically in his own backyard.

What makes Taylor's story unique? He learned the basic fundamentals of the construction trades — car-

pentry, electrical work and plumbing — during a bare-bones, six-week training program run by Bruce Cox in a West Oakland warehouse.

Cox, a contractor and owner of MBC Construction who also helped create a similar construction job training program for the Men of Valor group at Acts Full Gospel Church, said he is determined to give his time, knowledge and energy to help every aimless young person land a good job.

Cox said he just can't stand the thought of so many people without work when there is so much work to be done right

**"It's something new to them. They (developers) are used to local hires not working."**

**Bruce Cox**  
MBC Construction

Please see **JOBS**, News 11



### If you go

Bruce Cox's next construction training class will be held 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. April 15 at Alliance for West Oakland Development, 1357 Fifth St., Oakland. The class will meet Tuesdays and Thursdays for at least six weeks.

For more information, call 510-663-0363.



LAURA A. ODA — Staff photos

**STEPHON TAYLOR** (above), 20, runs wire through a condominium in the Pacific Cannery Lofts development in West Oakland. Taylor is among a handful of local residents hired to work on various projects in the large Central Station project on Wood Street after taking part in a construction training program run by Bruce Cox (left photo, right), a contractor who has donated his time and skills to help young people find jobs.

# Jobs program help locals become more productive

## ► JOBS, from News 1

where they live.

The lessons extend far beyond teaching his students the safe and proper technique for hammering a nail, wielding power tools, measuring a length of wood or framing a wall.

Many young men who attend Cox's classes have spent more time hanging out than holding a job, and have little idea what to expect when they enter a construction site, he said.

So Cox squeezes in lessons about life and tells them how it really is: Show respect and leave the attitude at home. Don't cuss. Be on the job 15 minutes early, dressed in work clothes and ready to go.

And last but not least: The boss is always right.

Cox socializes with the young men over meals. Many of them look to him not only as a mentor, but as a father figure.

Cox said he takes pride in watching his students succeed — and said he is always there to help them along the way.

Taylor has been working for Rex Moore electrical contracting for about eight months. Every three months he attends state-licensed electrician apprentice

classes in Hayward, a four-year program conducted by the Western Electrical Contractors Association, and he continues to attend twice-weekly training classes conducted by Cox, both to learn new skills and refresh and reinforce the ones he knows.

"I like the people I work with, and I like the fact that I'm going to school (to continue to learn)," Taylor said while pulling wire through framed walls in the Pacific Cannery Lofts project, one of several new residential developments that will cover 29 acres along Wood Street between 12th Street and West Grand Avenue.

Taylor said his co-workers have been helpful.

"Most of the guys I work with are from Sacramento, and they all have country accents," Taylor joked. "I'm teaching them the urban style."

His foreman, Darvin Crawford, said Taylor is a very good worker who has caught on quickly and worked hard to overcome his lack of experience and the lure of the neighborhood.

"I couldn't say a bad thing about him . . . He's highly intelligent and picked up the wiring very fast," Crawford said. "He's

very young, and he's going to make a lot of mistakes . . . but he's a good kid. I told him if he stays with it he'll make \$100,000 a year, no problem."

"This is good for Stephon," Cox said after visiting the job site. "He grew up here in West Oakland and he's positioning himself to make big money. I'm happy he keeps coming to class."

Taylor's wide smile showed he's happy things worked out, too. He said he really likes his job at Rex Moore and thinks he's found his niche in electrical work.

A few other of Cox's students also are working on the Central Station developments — with good results so far.

LaAndre Redd works as an apprentice plumber on the Pulte Homes development and Rapon Lee is doing framing and carpentry on the same project. Reggie Collier II — one of the first of Cox's students to get hired by Pulte — has joined the laborer's union and is vying for union jobs.

Although it was an uphill battle initially to get the Central Station developers to consider hiring his students, Cox said that has changed.

"It's something new to them," he said. "They are used to local hires not working."

The developers agreed to pay \$2,000 a month beginning six weeks before each of their projects started to help pay for the training program. So far, that includes Pulte Homes and Holiday Development.

Cox volunteers his time and scrounges building materials. Ashby Lumber donated some building supplies and a couple of women from the community have been bringing in food to feed the students on class nights.

He'd like to expand his program to include environmentally friendly building technologies and hire another instructor or two, but he cannot do that, he said, until he receives \$100,000 in redevelopment money the West Oakland Project Area Committee voted to grant him more than a year ago.

The funds also would help him work with the students individually to address their pressing needs, such as helping them get a GED high-school equivalency diploma. Without it, they cannot join the various trade unions and they lose out on job opportunities, Cox said.