

## DDOT's Office of Civil Rights: In the News

### DDOT Helps Pave the Way to Success

Nineteen District residents were lauded for their completion of a DDOT-sponsored apprenticeship program at a graduation ceremony on November 22.

The Pre-Apprenticeship Program for Highway Construction Trades was brought about through a partnership between DDOT, the Department of Employment Services (DOES), and the American Road & Transportation Builders Association (ARTBA), which provided safety training for the program. During the six-week course, participants were taught an assortment of skills necessary for a career in the construction field, including construction math, blueprint reading, first aid, and Spanish for construction safety.

District Councilmember Michael Brown was the keynote speaker at the event. Councilmember Brown praised the graduates and implored them to exhibit "sticktoitiveness" in the current economic climate and to doggedly pursue job opportunities until they end up with a fulfilling career.



*Jamilla Grooms receives her certificate of completion from Omar Lopez, a safety training specialist for ARTBA.*

Director Klein, who also spoke at the ceremony, was exultant about the program, describing it as one of the District Government's most successful endeavors.

According to Linda Fennell, a coordinator in DDOT's Business Opportunity and Workforce Development Center, the November 22 graduating class is one of three groups that DDOT plans to usher through the Pre-Apprenticeship Program in the next several months.

Sessions for the next program will start in January 2011, adds Ms. Fennell, and another

iteration of the program will commence this spring. DDOT hopes to provide training for 90 minorities, women, and disadvantaged individuals through the program this year.

Graduates of the program have a head start on gaining employment in the construction sector, says Ms. Fennell, because the program serves as an avenue for recruitment for DDOT-related contractors who have to comply with federal training goals for federally-funded construction projects.

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## ARJ Enterprises: Small Business Paves Its Way to Success



ARJ Enterprises Owner Andrew Robinson.

Enterprises, LLC – it didn't take long for him to learn that in the world of small business, persistence pays off.

ARJ was founded to fill the void left by the lack of minority asphalt pavers in the Washington Metropolitan area. Mr. Robinson began his career in trucking, but quickly recognized the need for asphalt paving companies in the Metropolitan area. After he had this realization, Mr. Robinson's main focus became, to quote his company's slogan, "Making It Black."

ARJ began its journey as a Maryland-based company in October 2003. Currently based in Ward 8 on Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue SE, Mr. Robinson's business is a full service minority-owned and operated asphalt paving and concrete company offering a wide range of construction services to the Metropolitan area.

Many entrepreneurs fuel their fledgling small businesses with passion and vision. However, the sad fact is that most businesses fail between their first and fifth years of operation, and that passion and vision withers.

However, for Andrew Robinson – the man behind ARJ

ARJ has been a DDOT-certified Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) firm and a client of DDOT's DBE supportive services program at the Business Opportunity and Workforce Development Center (BOWDC) for 2 years. The company is the only certified DBE asphalt paving company in the District that performs all asphalt paving and concrete services in-house. ARJ has also obtained certifications from the Minority Business Enterprise, Certified Business Enterprise, Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, and the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission. Mr. Robinson considers his company's involvement with the BOWDC, which provides business development services to certified DBEs and helps them obtain the necessary tools to offer competitive and quality services, to be an integral reason for ARJ's success.

ARJ has performed work on notable projects around the city: It provided milling work on the 14<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge approaches and helped to replace the asphalt on the 9<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge. The company is now partnering with Fort Myer Construction Company to assist with the construction of DDOT's Great Streets Initiative. ARJ has been sub-contracted to lay 19,000 tons of asphalt base on Pennsylvania Avenue SE (from 27<sup>th</sup> Street SE to Southern Avenue SE) for an estimated \$1.4 million dollars, the largest contract this firm has been awarded to date.

"The Pennsylvania Avenue project has given us the opportunity to show that small companies can get big jobs done," said Mr. Robinson. "We hope this high-profile project can open the door for other sub-contractors to get big business in this city."

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## Community Leaders Celebrate GLBT Month, Foster Understanding

In recognition of June as Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender (GLBT) Month, the DDOT Office of Civil Rights hosted a roundtable and brown bag lunch program on June 29, 2010. The event featured speakers from the GLBT community including Jeffrey Richardson, National Program Director for the Center for Progressive Leadership and President of the Gertrude Stein Democratic Club, and Christopher Dyer, Director for the Executive Office of the Mayor's Office of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender (GLBT) Affairs.

The discussions during the event centered on the GLBT community's achievements and their struggle for equal rights and opportunities. The District, in particular, was recognized as a community that supports the GLBT community's individual rights and contains residents who often support the GLBT community's rights for equal and fair treatment. In March, 2010 Washington, DC joined five states (New Hampshire, Iowa, Massachusetts, Vermont and Connecticut) in legally recognizing and allowing gay marriages to take place.



Jeffrey Richardson speaks at the event, which was held at the Reeves Center.

The speakers remarked that a surefire method to fight intolerance was for GLBT members to let their co-workers, fellow partitioners, and family members know about the issues that they face, so that GLBT issues take on a more personal dimension. This luncheon was a small step toward accomplishing this goal.

## d. Honor Roll: Civil Rights Employees Receive Commendations



**Linda Fennell** *Program Analyst*

Linda Fennell, a program analyst in the Civil Rights Division, is commended for her exceptional work in coordinating DDOT's Pre-Apprenticeship Program.

The program helps entrants to the apprenticeship program hone their job skills and trade readiness so that they will be prepared to find future work as apprentices. As a result of Linda's efforts, DDOT now joins the short list of state DOTs with Pre-Apprenticeship Programs.



**Raegan Williams** *Writer-Editor*

Raegan Williams, who works in DDOT's Civil Rights Division, was recently commended for her professionalism and efficiency by a company that she interacted with in her work to certify them as a Disadvantaged Business Enterprise.

Troy Thomas, CEO, and Darren Barnes, VP, of Conspec Contracting stated that Ms. Williams' customer service was "unmatched by any other government agency they've come into contact with."

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## Building Opportunities: DDOT Helps Minority-Owned Small Businesses

The District Department of Transportation (DDOT) is seeking to build successful partnerships with a diverse cadre of women- and minority-owned businesses to increase opportunities for small business enterprises in the highway construction industry.

DDOT's Office of Civil Rights administers two federal programs to help small business entrepreneurs successfully compete for procurement contracts in transportation construction: the Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) / Supportive Services Program and the On-The-Job Training / Supportive Services Program.

A DBE is defined in federal regulations (49 CFR Part 26) as a for-profit small business that is at least 51-percent owned by one or more individuals who are socially and economically disadvantaged and whose management and daily business operations are controlled by one or more of the socially and economically disadvantaged individuals who own it.

To further increase opportunities for DBEs, DDOT has partnered with the Washington Metropolitan Transit Authority (WMATA) to implement the Unified Certification Program (UCP), which allows certified DDOT DBEs to be automatically certified with WMATA. This program allows DBEs to grow their businesses by letting them bid on other regional transportation projects that will help enhance and diversify their portfolios.

### **Business Opportunity and Workforce Development Center**

The Business Opportunity and Workforce Development Center (BOWDC) is a community-based office that provides DBEs with up-to-date information on contracting and procurement opportunities. Conveniently located in Historic Anacostia, two blocks from the Anacostia Metro Station, the center is a resource for information about employment and procurement opportunities with major transportation agencies throughout the Washington Metropolitan Region.

The BOWDC offers a breadth of targeted services, including:

- Computer/Internet access and assistance with identifying DDOT contract and procurement opportunities;
- On-site bid room to review procurement documents;
- Resource library containing information for entrepreneurs on latest business trends and other pertinent information;
- A conference room for employee training sessions, and other business meetings; and
- Employment services, such as resume development and job searching resources.

For more information on the BOWDC, please contact the center at 202-645-8620.



## DDOT Holds Its First Annual Business Opportunity Forum Workshop

DDOT's Infrastructure Project Management Administration (IPMA) staged its first annual Business Opportunity Forum Workshop on September 8. Over 100 local contractors, consultants, and DBE firms gathered at Gallaudet University to learn about DDOT's future project plans and DDOT's procurement process.

Chief Engineer Ronaldo "Nick" Nicholson moderated, and Chief Contracting Officer Jerry Carter, Deputy Director Terry Bellamy, Chief of DDOT's Office of Civil Rights Lisa Gregory, and J. Christopher Lawson of the Federal Highway Administration - DC Division spoke on a panel at the event.

"The forum was our effort to encourage contractors, design firms, and suppliers to do business in DC," says Mr. Nicholson. "Given the current state of the economy, these types of business outreach forums are valuable to encourage competition."

Attendees were given a detailed presentation of the new and upcoming contract work that DDOT anticipates will need within the next year, which allowed business owners to learn about new opportunities that they can potentially compete for, as well as gain an understanding of the labor that will be required on each upcoming project. The last portion of the forum was reserved to allow the contractors and small businesses to get to know key DDOT personnel and network with other contracting companies.

This was the first of several events that will take place enlightening local small business owners on how to do



*Ms. Gregory speaks about the Disadvantaged Business Enterprise program.*

business with DDOT. The overwhelming interest and participation helped with the success of this "pilot" forum and has generated excitement that next year's forum will be even more successful. According to J. Christopher Lawson, another networking event is in the works to introduce sub-contractors to prime contractors, in the hopes that it will encourage more collaboration between these two types of entities.

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## DDOT's Office of Civil Rights Encourages Employees to Self-ID

The Office of Civil Rights is gearing up for their annual self-identification process. DDOT is required to collect data on race/ethnicity and gender to stay in compliance with Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This information is used to support DDOT's Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action program and helps the office ensure that women and minorities are fully utilized at all levels of the agency.

Often, there are misconceptions about the program, but Amy Vance, equal opportunity specialist, says that this program is not meant to limit anyone's employment opportunities or discriminate against qualified individuals.

"The purpose of the Affirmative Action program is to ensure that all employees have an equal opportunity to compete for jobs on an equal basis; this is a goal oriented program, not a quota program," she says. "If we identify disparities, then we can create targeted programs to increase recruitment of qualified applicants from protected groups."

The Office of Civil Rights is encouraging all new employees to self-identify. If you have not received a notice from your supervisor, expect a notice to arrive by the end of September. The one page form asks you to identify your gender and race/ethnicity. Currently, under federal regulations, an employee can select only one race/ethnicity category.

"We realize that this can create confusion, for example, for people who identify as bi-racial. Our advice is to select the category that best describes you," says Ms. Vance. This data is kept confidential and maintained in the Office of Civil Rights.

"Self-identification helps us to put together an accurate profile of the agency," adds Ms. Vance. If an employee chooses not to self-identify their race/ethnicity, the agency is authorized to identify the employee through visual observation.

"We'd like to avoid resorting to visual observation if at all possible," says Ms. Vance.

# DDOT Helps to ‘Rejuvenate’ Employee

## Visually Impaired PSMB Reviewer Utilizes Technology in Reassignment

DDOT’s Lisandro Herrera says he’s been “rejuvenated” after losing his sight in 2000, due in part to helpful DDOT colleagues and their assistance procuring machinery that helps him perform his job as a reviewer for the Public Space Management Branch.

In 2000 Mr. Herrera was diagnosed with diabetic retinopathy, which caused his vision to gradually decline. Although he credits his doctors for helping to improve his vision, Mr. Herrera is legally blind. After a series of 16 surgeries, Mr. Herrera’s vision is still “a haze,” he says.

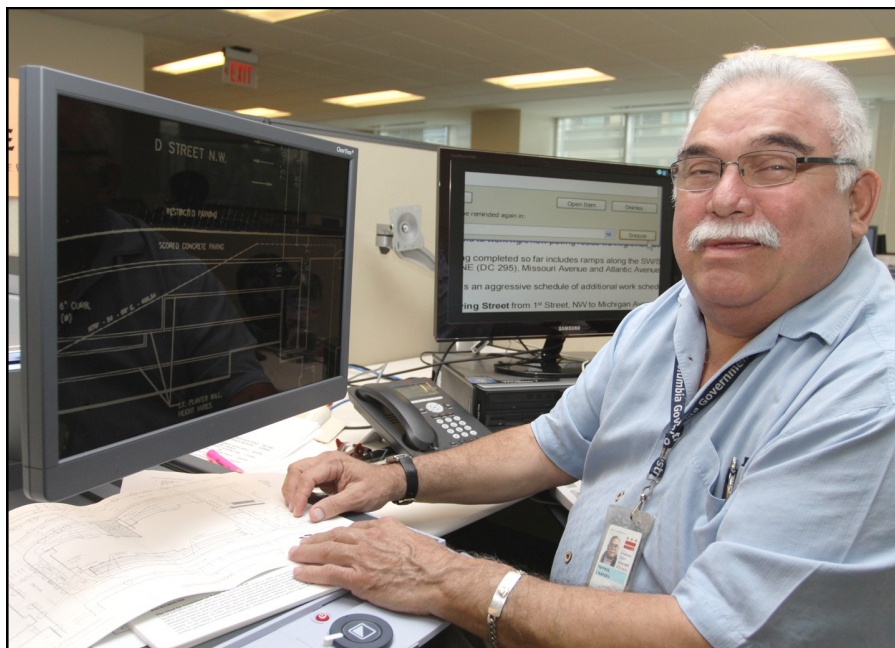
“There’s a fog. I can see you, but I can’t see clearly,” adds Mr. Herrera.

This traumatic change dramatically affected Mr. Herrera’s life. Not only did he “get more religious and more down to earth,” he questioned whether his job at DDOT, where he’s worked at since 1988, would be jeopardized by his condition.

Previously, Mr. Herrera was an engineering technician at IPMA and would frequently have to visit construction sites. However, with his impaired vision, Mr. Herrera cannot drive and has trouble seeing depth, which made visiting construction sites an unfeasible and dangerous proposition.

“I can’t see depth, which is crucial. If there’s a pothole, I’ll fall right into it because...everything seems flat,” explained Mr. Herrera.

***‘They’ve really worked with me here. Overall, it’s been going well. It feels like night and day.’***



*Mr. Herrera uses a machine (at left) and a computer program that enlarge text for him to read.*

During this tumultuous time a coworker eased Mr. Herrera’s anxiety by telling him a story about her sister, who was visually disabled and worked for the Federal Government, which helped her excel at her job despite her disability. Likewise, the District Government has since provided Mr. Herrera with the same tools and support to be a productive employee.

Approximately five months ago, Mr. Herrera was reassigned to PSMB, where he became a reviewer. Currently, he inspects blueprints submitted by contractors to ascertain whether the plans are going to adhere with the District’s guidelines for the use of public space. Mr. Herrera has several tools at his disposal to assist him with his job: a machine that magnifies a document’s text and displays it on a large 18.5” screen; a computer program that enlarges text on his computer screen; a sunlight lamp, which lets Mr. Herrera read using softer light that doesn’t hurt his eyes; and a keyboard with large lettering that was developed for people with visual disabilities.

Brett Rouillier, DDOT’s Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Coordinator, helped him obtain most of these tools, says Mr. Herrera. Mr. Herrera says he’s especially thankful to Mr. Rouillier as well as Director Gabe Klein, who signed a proclamation renewing DDOT’s commitment to protecting the rights of disabled persons on July 26, which marked the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of ADA. One of the ADA’s provisions instructs public entities to accommodate their employees, a charge that DDOT has been carrying out admirably, adds Mr. Herrera.

In addition, Mr. Herrera cites Public Space Manager Juan Amaya’s and PSMB’s Supervisory General Engineer Sunny Gyani’s support as another reason for his “rejuvenation.” Mr. Gyani, for example, works closely with Mr. Herrera and gives him valuable guidance on reviewing blueprints.

“They’ve really worked with me here,” says Mr. Herrera. “Overall, it’s been going well. It feels like night and day.”

# DDOT's Office of Civil Rights: Heritage Events

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## Black History Month Event Focuses on the District's Civil Rights Past



*Dr. Janette Hoston Harris encourages attendees to learn more about the history of the Civil Rights Movement in the District.*

DDOT's Office of Civil Rights sponsored a Black History program on February 18 that focused on the history of the Civil Rights Movement in the District.

Dr. Janette Hoston Harris of The Emma Mae Gallery and Heritage Gallery Museum and Visitor's Center presented historical photos that captured the District before and during the Civil Rights Movement. Ms. Harris encouraged attendees to learn more about the movement in the District by visiting the numerous museums in the city.

"There is so much history here, and you don't even know it," she added.

DC Public Library's Mark Greek discussed a new exhibit entitled *DC: I AM: Growing up in the Shadow of the Capitol* that chronicles the experience of different generations of District residents. The exhibit includes photos and artifacts from the Civil Rights Movement, the 1968 riots, pro-segregation demonstrations in the 1950s, and a 1928 yearbook from Dunbar High School, one of the country's first public high schools for African Americans. It will be on display at the Martin Luther King, Jr. library until May 1.

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## Hispanic Heritage Month Luncheon Focuses on Immigration Issues

The trials and tribulations of obtaining United States citizenship was one of the main topics at a luncheon that DDOT's Office of Civil Rights held to celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month on September 30.

After District resident Amed Sanz told attendees about the many hurdles he faced obtaining an immigrant visa, Claudia Cubas, an immigration lawyer in the Central American Resource Center, detailed the problems immigrants have in obtaining legal status.

"There are delays, insufficient number of visas...and there's an inadequate government system in place," said Ms. Cubas.

Mr. Sanz, for instance, had to wait in limbo for eight years until his visa application was approved. Ms. Cubas added that immigrants often have to wait 8 to 10 years for their visa applications to be approved.

Isela Ramos, an intern in DDOT's Office of Civil Rights, thought the event was a great success.



*Amed Sanz retells his immigration story as Claudia Cubas looks on.*

"In celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month, we learned about the personal stories, history, and legal issues around immigration reform," said Ms. Ramos. "This event brings us closer to unifying our District."