

Steve Lohr

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Olatoye Baiyewu runs a program to train young, inner-city men as apprentices to electricians, plumbers, carpenters and cement masons. A Nigerian who came to the Midwest in the 1970's as an agricultural export broker, Mr. Baiyewu eventually shifted his career to training programs because, he said, "we need to do a better job of exposing young African-American men to the opportunities of America."

Besides offering basic education on the construction trades, his six-week program requires his trainees to get a library card and to read books like "Animal Farm" and "Silas Marner." Workplace etiquette and personal finance are part of the curriculum. His training program is run on a shoestring budget with support from the city and state governments and local foundations.

Darnell Mason is a recent graduate. A 28-year-old father of three, he was originally steered toward Mr. Baiyewu's program from the local child support office. Mr. Mason, a high school graduate and a Navy veteran, seemed particularly impressed by the reading requirement. "They were real books that spark your intellect and get you thinking," he said. "In everyday society, all kinds of things are going to be thrown at you, so you have to be flexible, think things through and adapt."

Mr. Mason is now applying for jobs as an apprentice cement mason. The pay would start at about \$14 an hour, plus benefits, and over three or four years could rise to \$35 an hour — a long way, Mr. Mason said, from his \$7-an-hour warehouse jobs.

"I got into this because I want a career, not just another job," he said. "I'm 28 years old, I'm not getting any younger and I've got responsibilities."

With the region's construction businesses doing well, he has an excellent chance of being hired. Manufacturing jobs are a different story.

Although manufacturing still accounts for more than 20 percent of the employment in the Racine metropolitan area, about twice the national figure of 11 percent, the number of local manufacturing jobs has been falling for years as companies failed or fled to lower-cost production sites in the South or overseas.