



Steppingstones, Stepladders and Opportunities



Left to Right: Anabel Gonzalez, CDD GM
Richard Benbow and Lester Houston.

Getting and keeping that first job is a prime step into adulthood and the responsibilities that go with it. That's what Mayor Villaraigosa's summer youth employment program is all about. At a jobs rally in Watts, hundreds of young people who want work this summer were inspired to set goals and focus on their future.

"What was the first job you had? You know what I did?"

I was a dishwasher at a country club where no one like me could be a member of that club," said Community Development Department General Manager, Richard Benbow, "I made \$1.25 an hour. I was so happy at the end of the week to bring my first paycheck to my mother. The next summer I moved up to busboy because they liked my attitude and initiative. And then I moved the next summer to the prime position, managing the snack bar by the pool. Everything I have today started there. That's how I worked my way through college."

"This is your opportunity to invest in yourself. You have to be strong. You have to be focused. We are here to provide steppingstones, stepladders and opportunities," offered Michael Dolphin, Division Chief, California Employment Development Department.

During the jobs rally at the Watts Youth Opportunity Center, which offers a youth training and education program, officials from Ralphs and Colgate-Palmolive presented a \$10,000 check. Both companies have been strong supporters of the HIRE LA Youth program.

"We believe we have a special initiative to support young people and youth employment. We have positions in our stores that will lead to better positions. We don't offer jobs, we offer careers," said Charles Barfield from Ralph's.

Young people who are working, and have taken advantage of the education and training opportunities offered at the Watts Youth Opportunity Center talked about their job experiences.

"I'm a manager at Pizza Hut, the youngest in my region. I go to college now. If it wasn't for here (YO! Watts) I don't know where I'd be," said Lester Houston.

Anabel Gonzalez told the crowd, "I'm 16 and I'm working and I've got to be punctual and organized. I want to go to college, I want to be someone, I want to be a police detective."

The HIRE LA Youth 2007 Summer Employment Initiative, developed to offer job training and long-term employment opportunities, will provide 5,000 jobs to youth and young adults throughout the City of Los Angeles. The program will provide participants with opportunities to excel in both the classroom and the workplace. For more information, call (800)-FOR-A-JOB.