

# Transforming Communities and Lives at Liberty Square

By Michael Gordon



*Photo (left to right): Liberty Square residents and neighbors Leonard Johnson, Raphael White, Steve Lucien, Willie Phillips, and Henry Farmer hired by RUNU to help with demolition of Liberty Square.*

***“I didn’t have the skills to get a job.” “I’m an ex-con.” “There weren’t any opportunities for me.”***

These are some of the challenges to finding a job 25 residents recently hired to work at the redevelopment of Liberty Square public housing in Miami, Florida overcame thanks to Section 3.

All 25 residents are graduates of Employ Miami-Dade, a pilot program created to fill the gap between employers seeking skilled labor, and unskilled laborers who need skills training. At the completion of a six-week construction class, graduates receive a basic tool kit, and several certifications such as the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and the National Center for Construction Education Research. After graduation, the residents have gained real world construction experience by working on projects at Liberty Square that include re-manufacturing doors and windows, painting, plumbing, drywall and stucco, carpentry, electrical, demolition and asbestos removal.

Some of the graduates were hired by RUNU Construction to work at Liberty Square. Previously unemployed, Henry Farmer is a foreman at the site. “As an ex-felon, my life has changed tremendously. Coming from nothing to a little something has changed my life a lot.” Leonard Johnson also wanted to say thanks for a second chance. “I’ve been able to catch up on my child support, get my driver’s license back, and buy a car.” Steven Lucien worked as a fast food worker for 21 years. “This is a great opportunity! I’ve learned skills such as electrical and plumbing. I would like to save up my money, and build my own business to become a contractor,” said Lucien. Willie Phillips is also ecstatic. After working temporary jobs as an administrative assistant for most of her life, now “bills get paid,” and feels well-suited to find employment on any construction site after the completion of the Liberty Square redevelopment.