

Mobile-training unit creates path for jobless in Seminole

by Glenn Judah, Herald Staff

For Willy Jeanniton, a construction worker who has been jobless for the past two months, the chance to pick up new skills that lead to a job interview in a growing industry would be life-changing. Fortunately, the Sanford resident and father of three received that opportunity this week at a mobile training unit run by the Florida Manufacturing Extension Partnership.

With the help of Pathways to Home, a collaborate organization in Seminole County that connects out-of-work families with special services, Jeanniton and seven other Seminole residents learned new manufacturing skills at a state-of-the-art Mobile Outreach Skills Training site. The training vehicle was parked at Envirobrite, a company that retrofits energy-efficient lighting systems.

"This is a path for a better future," Jeanniton said.

The partnership's training unit is funded in part by a U.S. Department of Labor grant of \$856,000. Participants attend a concentrated, two-week program at which they can improve upon or obtain new manufacturing skills. The program consists of theory, practical skills, hands-on curriculum including computer-based 3-D simulations and self-paced training modules. Following the successful completion of the program, trainees receive opportunities to interview with participating employers ready to hire qualified applicants.

"Florida Manufacturing Extension Partnership offers options and resources for manufacturing companies seeking entry-level workers," said Gene Lussier, board chairman of the partnership. "We partner with participating companies from the beginning to understand their needs and find qualified candidates for our training sessions. We can even tailor our trainings specifically to the companies we're working with. For the trainees, this program offers more than skill building. It's a bridge to employment with a guarantee of a job interview and continued support through on-the-job training if they're hired."

Von Plourde, an owner of Envirobrite, said he needs new employees to keep up with the demand. Envirobrite, which employees about 130 employees, retrofits old lighting fixtures inside buildings that are 10 years and older to maximize power savings and light quality.

"We're not simply looking for people to hire, we're actually beginning the training process while we're still in the hiring phase," said Chuck Hansbrough, sales and marketing manager for Envirobrite. "We have a great level of comfort that Florida Manufacturing Extension Partnership and the program will help us find the right team members."

Candidates for the Seminole County training were selected by Florida Manufacturing Extension Partnership in conjunction with Pathways to Home and Manpower Inc., a company with locations throughout Florida that screens, recruits and reaches out to the unemployed. Participants are required to pass a basic education test and drug screening to qualify for the program. A representative from training program interviews each candidate prior to selection for involvement in the program.

"With so many unemployed Floridians, the work Pathways to Home is doing right now in

Seminole County has never been more important," said Debbra Groseclose, executive director of Pathways to Home.