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TUESDAY, Nov

Me2 spurs Milwaukee job growth

Energy-efficiency projects gain steam in cold weather

JAMES BRIGGS

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A Milwaukee energy-efficiency program is creating jobs for unemployed and underemployed construction workers.

After getting off to a slow start, the program, dubbed Me2, has created so much new construction work that builders have been forced to hire new people, according to city officials and contractors.

West Allis-based Draft Stoppers LLC, for instance, has gone from three employees to seven, owner John Ranieri said. The Me2 program is responsible for all four of the insulation contractor's recent hirings, he said.

"Adding four is pretty good," he said. "We're a small company."

Supported by \$12 million in federal money, Me2 subsidizes energy-efficient projects for home and business owners.

On the residential side, homeowners pay \$100 for energy auditors to visit and recommend improvements. Homeowners who follow through with recommendations and select an approved local contractor receive a \$100 reimbursement and have access to 5.5 percent financing.

The program also offers low-interest, no-money-down loans for commercial projects.

Participating contractors complained this year that Me2 had failed to create work for them. Now that the weather is getting colder, though, the program is taking off, said Matt Howard, the city's environmental sustainability director.

"What we're starting to hear is we're getting close to that tipping point where contractors are so busy right now that, in order for them to take on additional jobs, they may need to start hiring," Howard said.

"So, obviously, one of our goals of the program is to get the contractors to start hiring. We think Me2 is really going to be our big-ticket item in terms of job creation."

As the program becomes more successful, though, city officials also are looking more closely at who's receiving the work. Contractors that become certified for the Me2 program must commit to giving at least 40 percent of the labor hours performed on projects to workers enrolled

Obama's high-speed rail h

Billions ensure work persists on some projects

JOAN LOWY

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — While Congress voted last week to kill spending for President Barack Obama's signature high-speed rail program, the initiative still could have some life.

Republican lawmakers are claiming credit for killing the program. But billions of dollars still in the pipeline will ensure work will continue on some projects. And it's still possible money from another transportation grant program can be steered to high-speed trains.

Obama requested \$8 billion in fiscal 2012 for the program and \$53 billion over six years.

But House-Senate bargainers last week



Passengers depart Amtrak's Capitol Corridor train Nov. 4 in Dav. House and the Senate that would kill spending for high-speed rail, that will ensure that work will continue on some projects.

agreed to a broad spending bill that eliminates any spending specifically for high-speed trains. The House approved that legislation Thursday, 298-121, and the Senate

followed to the W

BOARD MEETING



STAFF PHOTO BY KEVIN HAFNACK

John Meixelsperger (left) and Tom Grosse, both of Trend Construction Inc., DeForest, hang a panel of fiberglass reinforcement on a wall at the DeForest Plaza that's under construction in Madison. Engineered Construction Inc., Verona, is overseeing the two-building, 12,610-sq-ft project, which is nearing completion and already has a tenant open for business.

Labor board rushes to OK new

Biz groups denounce 'ambush elections'

SAM HANANEL

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The National Labor

The board is expected Nov. 30 to approve a plan that dramatically could shorten the time frame for union elections.

The rules would be more limited than the sweeping plan proposed during the summer, a move designed to let the board approve them more quickly.

Business groups have denounced the

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City to enforce local hiring rules

Me2, FROM PAGE 1A

To qualify for RPP, workers must live in the city and either be unemployed or considered low income. For instance, a person in a family of four could earn \$40,000 a year and still qualify for RPP.

That can be a difficult threshold to meet, especially for small contractors. Before the recent hirings at Draft Stoppers, only one of the company's three employees qualified as an RPP worker.

"Until we had to hire more people," Ranieri said, "we weren't quite at that point."

Erick Shambarger, an environmental sustainability manager for Milwaukee, said the city had given contractors a break on the RPP requirement.

"We gave the contractors a little bit of a grace period to meet that until the number of jobs ramped up, and they could justify bringing in workers," he said.

"But, as that's come on, we've said, 'OK, you have enough work in the pipeline that you can hire new workers, and the next guy you hire better be an RPP employee.'"

Draft Stoppers chose RPP-certified

workers for all four of its recent openings, Ranieri said.

"The Me2 program has provided adequate training for us to hire, and we found employees that live in the city of Milwaukee," he said.

Because of the success of the program, Shambarger said, some of the city's most disadvantaged workers are finding new opportunities for long-term employment.

"I've been referring those workers to contractors that are willing to hire," he said, "to make sure we're getting Milwaukeeans employed on this work."

ON TARGET



STAFF PHOTO BY KEVIN HARNACK

Crews remove rubble Nov. 2 that was left behind after the demolition of a building that once housed Quebecor World Print at 12821 W. Bluemound Road in Brookfield. Ryan Cos. US Inc., Minneapolis, pledged to spend \$1 million toward environmental cleanup of an abandoned 20-acre site and has started to build a new shopping center anchored by a Target Corp. store.

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