

Woodlawn Apprentice Program has Monumental Impact

By Gary Axelbank - July 1, 2020



(L-R) Woodlawn graduates, Leon Butt, Jonathan Mendoza, and Michael Neelis show off their certificates after graduation from the Woodlawn Conservancy's Bridge to Crafts Careers – Preservation Training Program (thisistheBronX)

On Wednesday the [Woodlawn Cemetery and Conservancy](#) held a graduation ceremony for eleven apprentices who have worked in the [Bridge to Crafts Careers – Preservation Training Program](#) (PTP). It's a hands-on program that gives young adults (18-24) a chance to actually clean and repoint grave markers of all sizes as well as cut and clean mortar joints of some of the 130,000 mausoleums and monuments that populate one of the world's most historic burial places.



The PTP provides mentorship, training, and certification that has proven to have significant impact on the lives of participants. Graduates of the program have gone on to careers with Local 1, the Bricklayers and Associated Craftworkers Union, and independent restoration firms and in the construction industry.

"They're entering into a trade where they're going to earn good money and be able to open up checking accounts, have families get apartments, and buy cars," said Woodlawn President and CEO Mitch Rose. "It is most rewarding to look back at our alumni and see how their lives have changed since graduation. It's phenomenal because we're creating jobs, good jobs for young men and women who are in many cases are staying here in the Bronx and through their own economic strength, they're serving the very same community that the program originates in."

The students from this [cleverly-designed program](#) graduate with capabilities in a range of skill sets.

"They restored three major mausoleums and we made sure one was granite, one was limestone, and one was marble," said Susan Olsen, Director of Historical Services. "They use different cleaning skills for different products based upon the stone type so that they get a sense of bio growth and the weathering based upon how the monument was cut. We're very specific in what we select."



Over the five years of the program, PTP apprentices have restored over 250 monuments and mausolea. Because of its 400-acre size and the variety of materials used in the creation of thousands of monument structures, Woodlawn is an ideal location to teach cleaning, caulking and mortar re-pointing.

The PTP program combines classroom and hands-on work, but because of the pandemic, it was more challenging for this year's group of grads than for previous participants in the program that started in 2015. Woodlawn's spring 2020 cohort of PTP interns had just begun their internships when COVID-19 closed schools and offices, moving the classroom portion of the program virtually online. But the interns benefitted from the expertise of guest lecturers, submitted their sketches and homework, and completed their 30-hour OSHA training online.

In fact they even worked at home on an incredibly inventive lesson where they used cereal boxes to fabricate gravestone monuments towards understanding the practical applications they would employ once the city opened to Phase One.

"Imagine one cereal box laying flat, which is the base of a monument, and another cereal box sitting up vertically on top of it, that's basically a monument and they learned how to measure it," said Program Director of the [World Monuments Fund](#) Frank Sanchis, one of the instructors in the ten-week course. "They all seemed to have liked it a lot and everybody got something out of it, so I was very pleased with the way it worked out."

Participants receive certification in the use of Jahn Mortar (masonry repair material), man lift operation, and Stationary Scaffolding. Additional training in financial management, interview skills, resume writing, and work place etiquette was conducted by [The Door](#), Woodlawn's non-profit partner, with expertise in providing a comprehensive approach to youth services. The program is operated in collaboration with the World Monuments Fund and the [International Masonry Institute](#).

"I hope this class never forgets where they learned because on these sacred grounds rest the individuals who paved the way for your future," President Rose told the graduates, "and by you creating your future here, it truly offers the greatest reward in life you will ever know. And I hope you too, can someday make a difference for someone else."

Through funding support from the New York City Department of Community Development's Advance and Earn Program, in the fall of 2020 in partnership with the Door, the Conservancy will launch the *Landscape Restoration Program*, providing similar training to prepare young people for entry level positions in landscaping and horticulture.

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