



# NEWS

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## **"HANDI-CAPABLE" WORKERS DRAW RAVES FROM BUSINESS OWNERS NEAR A TRIO OF METRO RED LINE CONSTRUCTION SITES**

"The Employ America crew provides an extra touch that's really needed to make life more livable while the Red Line station is being built near my business," says Bernard Wisner, owner of Beverly Discount Fabrics.

Wisner is referring to a group of developmentally disabled men and women who have been hard at work keeping clean the sidewalks and other areas outside the fences of three Metro Red Line stations under construction on Vermont Avenue.

For the past three years these workers have donned hard hats and safety vests, and, armed with brooms, shovels and trash cans they've made it their business to keep the area around the Vermont Avenue construction sites at Sunset Boulevard, Santa Monica Boulevard and Beverly Boulevard free of trash and debris.

"They do a wonderful job," says Ted Speigel, owner of Radio Equipment Distributors at Vermont and Willowbrook. "Construction sites generate a tremendous amount of dirt, dust and trash, and there's no way the city can respond as quickly as these people do."

The workers of Employ America are referred by the state to the not-for-profit agency Social Vocational Services (SVS) which has dubbed the cleanup program Employ America.

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Their wages are paid through funding from MTA, which Spiegel says speaks well for the Authority. "Next to expanding the Red Line subway, providing for the Employ America crew to work in my neighborhood is one of the best services the MTA provides."

Robert Coto joined the ranks of Employ America three months ago. "It feels good to do a service for the community," says Coto. "Business owners have told us they like what we're doing. And when we do a good job, they do good business."

Now a fixture around the construction sites, it's not uncommon for a business owner or nearby resident to invite Coto and the other crew members in for a drink of water, a bite to eat, or just to say "thanks for a job well done."

Edgar Pinera works at the UNOCAL service station at Beverly and Vermont where he's had more than a few conversations with Employ America crew members. "They're doing a great job, week after week. I can just imagine how much litter we'd see around the neighborhood if it weren't for them," says Pinera. "They often stop in to purchase snacks or to use the restrooms. And as far as I'm concerned, they're always welcome."

On any given day the crew consists of approximately eight workers who spend one day per week at each of the three station construction sites. Another day is spent keeping clean the area outside the Red Line's Wilshire/Vermont station which opened last July when the Red Line was extended from MacArthur Park to Western Avenue. The crew rounds out its week by spending a day at whichever of the four locations needs some extra attention.

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"Some of the crew members have been on the job for as long as two years, proof that it's a win-win situation," says MTA Public Affairs Officer Andre Parvenu. "In fact, I like to call it a triple win. MTA's community wins by having a cleaner neighborhood. MTA itself wins by bringing such a valuable service to construction neighborhoods. And the men and women of Employ America win too as they develop good work habits and build self esteem."

MTA has opened its own doors, as well, employing four Employ America workers in the mailroom of its Gateway headquarters.

"The Employ America workers truly are ambassadors of goodwill for the MTA," says MTA Board Chairman Larry Zarian. "We strive to be a good neighbor to business owners and residents, and I can't think of anyone more dedicated to that end than these fine people."

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