

## Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District's Good Neighbor Ambassador Program

### Bringing Jobs to Communities Impacted by Construction Projects

Good Neighbor Ambassadors doing clean-up work in the Glenville neighborhood of Cleveland.



Looking east from the front steps of St. Aloysius Church, churchgoers see an entire city block that is now a job site. Cranes, vertical boring machines, and construction equipment dot the otherwise sunny November sky with signs of construction. For residents in Glenville—a historic, east side Cleveland neighborhood—cranes and construction are a common sight.

With 25 active construction sites, the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District is investing billions of dollars in sewer infrastructure to reduce the amount of combined sewer overflows that negatively impact the environment. The sewer systems in communities like Glenville are old and cannot handle the amount of wastewater flows that enter the system during heavy rains; the upgraded system will capture combined sewage (a mixture of sanitary sewage and stormwater) until it can be properly treated at a wastewater treatment plant.

Today, the neighborhood has three large construction projects—Dugway Storage Tunnel, Dugway West Interceptor Relief Sewer and Dugway South Relief and Consolidation Sewer—that will be active until 2019. Then, beginning in 2020, three additional large projects will continue for another five years. The impact to this community is significant, and for such a big undertaking, the Sewer District needed to secure buy-in from the community.

Construction projects of this magnitude certainly create jobs, but many residents argue that there are not enough local residents working on these projects.

“Prior to us starting Dugway projects, we had a number of meetings concerning 10 years of work,” said Darnella Robertson, Manager of Government Affairs, NEORS. “At these meetings, a resounding theme arose: Who is doing the work, and why can’t they look like people who live in the community?”

While the Sewer District cannot dictate hiring practices on its construction projects, senior leadership at the agency wanted to do everything possible to help a neighborhood directly impacted by years of construction. “We cannot necessarily mandate who works on our projects, but we can impact how our work impacts the community,” said Robertson.

### **Build the Next Gen Water Workforce**

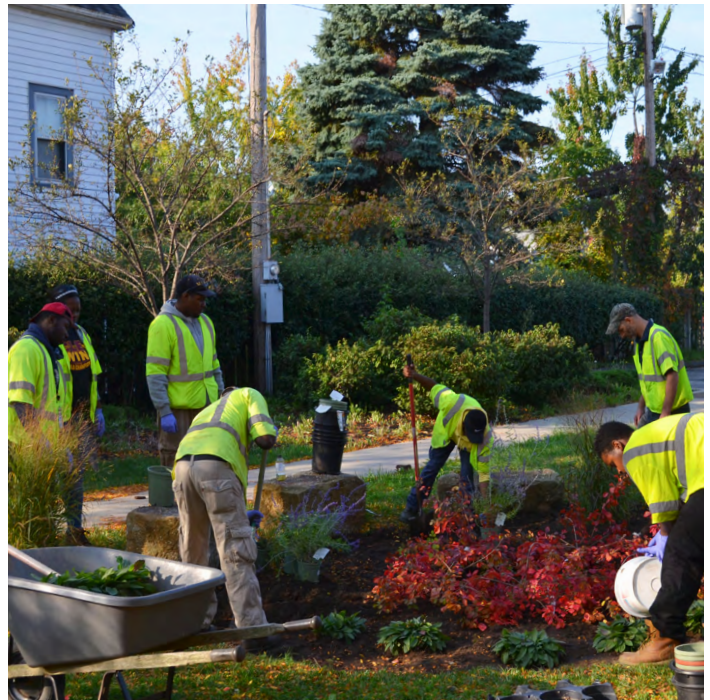
In 2013, the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District established a groundbreaking new program designed to better connect the Sewer District with the communities it serves. This progressive, one-of-a-kind job-development initiative—the Good Neighbor Ambassador Program—integrates community outreach with career opportunities for unemployed and underemployed individuals in neighborhoods impacted by Sewer District construction projects.

“Glenville is a blighted, underserved, densely populated community,” says Anthony Body, Good Neighbor Ambassador Supervisor, NEORS. “The program is not just about finding people a job, but providing assistance with finding a career.”

The Good Neighbor Ambassadors act as liaisons between the Sewer District, various community and business organizations, government officials and the general public. The Ambassadors keep residents up-to-date on what is happening in their neighborhood, distributes informational materials, answer questions and address concerns about the Sewer District’s construction projects. The Ambassadors also perform clean-up and maintenance work near the job sites, and participate in educational and professional-development opportunities offered by the Sewer District. Each week, the Ambassadors receive career-development training on such topics as resume writing and personal finance skills in addition to completing their hands-on community work.

“Other programs, even here in Cleveland, are generally job-focused,” said Stanley Miller, former Vice President of External Affairs at AT&T, and current consultant with SRM Group working to establish the program. “We tried to put together a program that would give our Ambassadors skills to be successful in any career, not just here.”

The Program is designed to be a means of temporary employment, and prepares the Ambassadors for full-time employment (either at the Sewer District or externally) and offers training opportunities including the Operator Training



Good Neighbor Ambassadors constructing a raingarden to capture stormwater.

Certification of Ohio wastewater certification classes, Cuyahoga Community College, team-building with the US Army, and safety training in conjunction with Cleveland Division of Police and the Sewer District’s Health and Safety Department.

“The Good Neighbor Ambassador Program is a pathway to a career,” said Body. “It’s an opportunity to expose them to other opportunities.”

The Ambassadors long-term career paths are diverse and range from interior design to construction to medical fields. In addition to training opportunities, the Ambassadors have had opportunities to visit unions to learn more about trade skills and investigate future job prospects in the trades. “We are building good working partnerships with local unions,” said Robertson.

One of Body’s favorite success stories is that of Ramone Smith, a member of the second cohort and resident of Glenville. Body had actually met Smith years ago, when they both worked at Marc’s, a local discount grocery chain. Before joining the Ambassador program, Smith had recently lost both his mother and father. During especially tough times, when he didn’t even have bus fare, he would walk from his home in Glenville to his job nearly eight miles





Members of Good Neighbor Ambassador Cohort #3 received graduation certificates from Cuyahoga Community College's Job Readiness Program.

away at Nordstrom. Smith learned about the Ambassador program and jumped at the opportunity to be a part of it. During his tenure as an Ambassador, Smith was able to work in various Sewer District departments, including the wastewater treatment plants. Today, Smith is a Customer Service Representative for the Sewer District and has been a permanent member of the team for five months.

"He's a poster child for opportunity," says Body. "He took the ball and ran with it. Guy makes good."

### A Sustainable Future for All

Many Glenville residents are pleased with the work the Ambassadors do. Alice Bonner, a resident in the community, has learned a lot about the Sewer District since the program's inception. She appreciates the Ambassadors and likes their visibility. She attended the most recent Sewer University presentation where she learned about the history of Cleveland's sewer system and its impact to the Cuyahoga River. She spoke with Mr. Body following the presentation and echoed how much she learned at the program. "She doesn't feel so bad about paying her bill," said Body. "She gets it now."

In addition to community buy-in, the Sewer District has worked tirelessly to build political will for the program and support for our infrastructure investment in Greater Cleveland. To date, 27 Ambassadors have been recruited by the Program; nine are currently working as Good Neighbor Ambassadors and 11 Ambassadors have obtained full-time employment. Over the next ten years, throughout the entirety of work in the Glenville neighborhood, the program could reach more than 100 Ambassadors. This program demonstrates the Sewer District's commitment to sustainable practices—from environmental awareness to job creation—in our region.

"A lot of the Ambassadors want to work for the Sewer District," said Miller. "It's the first time they are in a setting with a welcoming, supportive job environment."

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