

**Hire St. Louis program**  
**St. Louis Program Helps Minority Workers**  
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By CHERYL WITTENAUER Associated Press Writer © 2008 The Associated Press

ST. LOUIS — Rep. Rodney Hubbard, D-St. Louis, said he hears from constituents nearly every day who complain of a lack of jobs for urban blacks.

Mayor Francis Slay said he has been struck by the "shockingly high" unemployment rate for urban blacks who lack a high school diploma.

The two men started talking more than a year ago about how to turn around that trend in St. Louis.

Before long, labor leaders, unions and employment specialists were on board.

The result is the "Hire St. Louis" initiative that will connect 1,000 minority workers with job training and employment over the next three years, while benefiting children and stabilizing neighborhoods in the process, Slay said.

Slay said the jobs campaign will focus on positions in manufacturing, life and bio sciences, construction, transportation and warehousing, hospitality, retail trade, health care and information technology.

Training and education for good jobs are available at little or no cost, but often go unused, Slay said.

Tom Jones, executive director of St. Louis Agency on Training and Employment or SLATE, said jobseekers typically want work right away and settle for minimum-wage jobs. They'd do better deferring the search just a little, while they pursue training for a higher-paying position. The federally funded city division will guide the jobs initiative.

Jones said labor statistics from the University of Missouri-St. Louis say there are 7,000 jobs in 121 fields in the St. Louis area. But most require skills training.

"It will be our goal to create new partnerships, identify obstacles and address them together so many more young African-Americans who want to work hard get the opportunity to do so," Hubbard said.

The city and SLATE will offer the first of three job fairs from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. April 24 at America's Center in downtown St. Louis. The first will focus on training and job opportunities in the health care industry. Two others this year will focus on other career areas.

The St. Louis Convention & Visitors Commission and three audio/visual unions, which last week reached an agreement on new work rules, announced Friday that they too would be recruiting and training minority workers.

Recently, Slay and U.S. Rep. William Lacy Clay, D-St. Louis, announced the procurement of \$600,000 in federal funds for a summer jobs program.

Slay said U.S. cities have been hit hard by cutbacks in federal funding for jobs programs.

An activist minister who frequently has criticized the number of jobs awarded to black contractors said Friday, "I praise the effort of this mayor to bring this coalition together.

"This indeed is a historical event," the Rev. Cleo Willis said.

But, he said many employers resist hiring black youths.

"Resistance," he said, "is real."

Charles Bryson  
Director of Public Safety  
City of St.Louis