Minnesota Construction Industry Anticipating New Crop of Minority Workers

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The sky of the Twin Cities is littered with cranes of projects underway. Work is being done on the new Vikings stadium, Wells Fargo Complex and numerous buildings with condos.

Summit Academy, a community-based vocational and job program in North Minneapolis is taking notice of something more, the workers and the fact that it's mainly white men overall under those hard hats. Efforts are being made to introduce more minorities to the construction industry.

Faye Crow-Ghost is training to be a construction worker. She's nearly completed Summit Academy's Pre-Apprentice Construction program.

"Being a minority is a big deal. I don't see a lot of Native Americans, Indigenous People in this industry," she said.

She's Native American and wonders if she will get the same opportunities as her white counterparts. Summit Academy says one of the biggest challenges is that there are just not enough qualified minority construction workers. That's why training is so important.

The Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development or DEED figures show over 6,000 minorities employed in the construction industry in Minnesota as of the third quarter of 2014. That's 4.6 percent of all jobs in the industry at that point. There were roughly 134,000 construction jobs in Minnesota in the third quarter of 2014.

"That's today come 2020 the only growth in the workforce will come from people of color," Louis King of Summit Academy said.

Data from the Wilder Foundation shows a dramatic change in population will take in the next 30 years. By 2040, the number of white residents is expected to decrease by 21 percent. For people of color the population is expected to grow by 44 percent.

"So what's important today is to build a pipeline," he said.

Last fall, the construction companies working on the stadium and the Downtown East Project provided an update on minority hiring goals being met at the sites.

Mortenson and Thor construction said minority participation is at 37 percent women participation is at nine percent and veteran participation is at four percent.

Ryan Companies told the facilities authority virtually the same information. Currently, minority participation is at 37 percent, women participation is at 12 percent and veteran participation is at 0.8 percent.