

Bronx Students Earn “Living Wages” by Building Green Roofs

Bronx teacher Stephen Ritz enables America's youngest Certified Green Roof Installers from Discovery High School (Bronx) to earn Living on a Hampton's green roof project this Friday, August 13, 2010.

Bronx, NY, August 9, 2010 – Bronx teacher Steve Ritz has scheduled his Discovery High School students to install a state-of-the-art green roof in East Hampton, Long Island this coming Friday, August 13th. These students are the youngest members of Green Living Technologies' Installer Certification program that graduated in March 2010. Joining these students will be other South Bronx students from The Point CDC's ACTION Program and from Global Energy Action's Harlem Program. This partnership will link NYC youth together in peer to peer career mentoring and community awareness.

Results of these partnerships often transcend student's lives. For example, all of Ritz's students have voluntarily completed additional coursework required by the NYC Department of Education via a summer program resulting in them qualifying to earn Living Wages well above their peers who are struggling to find employment in this tough economy. Thus, while moving towards graduation, these NYC high school students are gaining invaluable real-world practical experience installing Green Living Technologies (GLT) green roofs and walls that are growing in demand.

Equally impressive is the academic performance of the students enrolled in Steve Ritz's classes. Over the years, their average attendance has doubled from 43% to over 90%, and in almost every case, year after year; these students have a 100% passing rate on the NYS Regents Exams. As evidenced of the program, via standardized testing, their literacy and math skills increase on average almost four years per student because they are so self-motivated and engaged. Many of these same students are now attending extra classes this summer to ensure they graduate on time, a requirement to continue in the Green Roof public-private partnership with Green Living Technologies. It is no coincidence GLT CEO George Irwin is a NYS certified teacher himself, dividing his time between educating tomorrow's environmental stewards and managing his burgeoning business.

Last June, Ritz met Irwin on the set of Good Morning America where GLT products were featured along with his outstanding students. Their innovative public-private partnership continued when Irwin accepted Ritz's invitation to teach a 40-minute class at Discovery High School. This led to a GLT-funded scholarship program that took these students from the Bronx to Boston, Massachusetts for formal training with GLT affiliate Cityscapes PC. Following their graduation from the intensive GLT training in Boston, they returned to the Bronx more excited and determined to take charge of their education, careers and lives. After receiving their certifications from Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr., the students and faculty met Mayor Bloomberg and Rachel Ray who lauded their work.

According to Irwin, “Steve (Ritz) is all about creating possibilities and implementing models of self-sustainability. As classroom teacher and Bronx advocate, Steve is always thinking 'outside the box,' inspiring students to take responsibility for their lives and their futures; it is obvious why he won the 2009 USS Intrepid Hometown Hero Award and the 2010 US EPA Award. His innovative use of Green Living Technologies green roofs and walls are achieving incredible

results that can be measured in the classroom and in the field. Ritz's orchestration of a huge 'School Garden to School Cafe' event June 3rd enabled his teens to cook and serve 450 organic meals using fresh vegetables they had grown from seeds in their classroom using GLT walls and in containers, bringing the program home.”

According to Ritz, indoor gardening and edible walls via GLT allow him to “not only grow vegetables, but more importantly, to grow students and citizens on a daily basis and we’re just getting started.” Not bad for a teacher who has managed to grow in excess of 20,000 pounds of vegetables to date in the Bronx. The upcoming August 13th green roof installation is at 50 Green Hollow Road, East Hampton NY, 11937. It is one of two GLT projects these students are installing this summer. They are getting paid while learning practical job skills of outside the traditional classroom. Back in the classroom, Ritz is very excited about two NYC DOE programs, School Garden to School Café and Food Fight and continues to integrate them into his daily routines which feature student involvement before, during and after school.

To be sure, there are many obstacles, complexities and technical nuances inherent in such installations. That is why classroom PowerPoint presentations alone are insufficient to master the process. Green Living Technologies recognized these limitations, and developed a unique training program incorporating hands-on authentic training with continuing educational / project management support. Ritz and students recently installed a Mobile Edible Wall Unit - MEW - and an indoor picture wall at Bronx County Courthouse and have additional units producing significant volumes of food all summer long across the Bronx and Westchester. According to Ritz, “think about the financial implications for families living below poverty levels when their children are coming home with bags of high quality, high cost groceries every other week via academic engagement and career readiness, while greening our communities and lives no less.”

Early results from this collaborative apprenticeship program have exceeded all expectations. This Ritz-GLT joint effort has New York City buzzing about the success this first graduating green class of Bronx students is achieving. What does the future hold for these students? With cutting-edge skills and proven work experience, they will be in demand by many companies within the growing green industry.

About Green Living Technologies, LLC

Green Living Technologies (GLT), a privately held firm manufacturing Green Living™ Walls and Green Roofs, and is a global pioneer in Vertical Agriculture and education. CEO George Irwin is a published author known as the “Green Wall Editor,” and a leading global resource and authority for green wall and roof technologies.

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