



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 15, 2014

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GreenRoutes helps seasonal laborers, under-employed workers and ex-offenders find, keep and advance in green jobs

Delaware Center for Horticulture & Delaware Department of Labor team up to launch a 15-week skills and job readiness training program free to participants

The Delaware Center for Horticulture (TheDCH) is pleased to announce GreenRoutes, a new winter course that equips men and women for entry level green-collar jobs and career paths. The 15-week program, which runs January – April 2015, is free to participants and is possible through a grant from the Delaware Department of Labor Division of Employment.

Finding, landing and keeping a good paying job can be tough for men and women who have been seasonal laborers, out of the job market, or involved in the penal system, says TheDCH Adult Education Manager Bonnie Swan, who developed the course curriculum. These populations often need new trade skills and experience to compete in today's marketplace. They may also need life skills and job readiness training, as well as ongoing mentoring and support to stay on track.

GreenRoutes aims to address these needs with a comprehensive horticulture program that includes 350 hours of classroom and field training, case management, placement in a 100 hour internship to gain experience, job placement, and post-program mentoring and support. These elements are designed to work together to equip men and women to find and keep an entry-level green job – and to progress in the industry once hired, Swan said.

In addition to horticulture topics, the curriculum includes job readiness and life skills training, with instruction on computer literacy, financial competency, interview skills, time management, and more. Certifications include Commercial Nutrient Handler Certification, Pesticide Applicator's License, OSHA General Industry Safety Training, and First Aid/CPR Certification.

Jeff Long, the recruiter and case manager for GreenRoutes, is eager to see men and women succeed in the program.

"I've always had a strong interest in social justice issues," said Long, TheDCH Community-Based Education Coordinator, a seasoned environmental educator with extensive nonprofit experience. "This gives people who might not otherwise have the opportunity, to get a good-paying job and a better future for themselves and their families."

It can also be a welcome second chance after someone has made some mistakes or gotten sidetracked in life, Long says: the program is open to non-violent ex-offenders, parolees, and those on prison work-release. However, unlike the program's predecessor, Return to Work Green Jobs for ex-offenders (the [2014 recipient of the national Award for Education Innovation](#) by the Arbor Day Foundation), GreenRoutes is open to seasonal laborers, under-employed and unemployed workers. Participants can continue to collect unemployment benefits during the training and internship.

"We wanted to [build on the success of Return to Work](#) by broadening participation and deepening the educational experience," Swan says. "We see it as a wonderful intersection of the knowledge among TheDCH staff and our mission to share that knowledge."

For people who love to work outside and with plants, a trade in the horticulture industry makes good sense: the Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts 12 percent job growth in the industry overall between 2010 and 2020. The outlook for opportunities in landscaping, ground keeping, and nursery work are is even better: they are expected to grow 18 percent in the same period.

Candidates do not need previous horticulture experience, but must have a strong interest in jobs like landscaping, gardening, turf management, growing, arboriculture, and floral arranging, as well as a high motivation to find and keep a job at the program's completion.

An [application](#) is available online. Interviews are being scheduled for mid-December.

The Delaware Center for Horticulture cultivates a greener community; inspiring appreciation and improvement of our environment through horticulture, education and conservation. We create neighborhoods that are healthier, more attractive and ecologically sustainable. Our work includes community gardens, public landscapes, road-side beautification, tree programs, educational programs and community and membership events. The DCH is the only nonprofit membership organization that mobilizes and inspires community greening statewide in urban and suburban environments.