

CRAIN'S DETROIT BUSINESS

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Campaign seeks to find summer jobs for youths

By [Sherri Welch](#)

Rod Rickman was born and raised the 11th of 12 children in Detroit's Brewster Projects in a single-parent home after his father died when he was just seven.

But he recalls how others — like a businessman named Dave Bing, who spent time mentoring the kids in the projects, and a neighbor named Mr. Robbins — changed his life.

Robbins and other residents and local companies gave Rickman and his younger brother odd jobs painting and cleaning garages that later evolved into a business.

"Those early odd jobs were very instrumental," said Rickman, now 49 and owner of **Rickman Enterprise Group**, a \$10 million business that has provided facility maintenance and janitorial services and industrial and environmental cleaning for the past 25 years to customers in 40 states.



Rod Rickman urges businesses to support summer youth employment.

Rickman and his company are among many stepping up to campaign for Detroit-based summer jobs and funding to help subsidize them for at least 7,000 Detroit youths ages 14 to 24.

City Connect Detroit, subcontracted last year to run the youth employment program for Detroit's Workforce Development Department, launched the campaign after seeing a gap between demand for summer jobs and available positions.

"There's a lot of conversation about needing to attract young talent from around the country ... this effort is about growing young talent right here," said City Connect CEO Geneva Williams.

For the past 30 to 40 years, the city has placed about 2,500 to 3,000 young Detroiters in summer jobs each year, Williams said. Last year, with about \$11 million in stimulus money, the city was able to place 7,000.

But it got applications from 25,000 young candidates for those jobs, she said.

With no stimulus money in hand for this year yet, City Connect is trying to create a sustainable program to allow placement of at least another 7,000 youths in growing industries such as green energy and health care again this year.

Those Detroit-based jobs are expected to run for six weeks, 20 hours each week and to cost about \$1,500 per youth to cover wages and training and related costs, Williams said.

Staggered, six-week employment opportunities begin July 6 and run through the fall.

So far, 220 governmental units, nonprofits and businesses have offered to employ Detroit youths, with subsidies, Williams said.

The **Skillman Foundation** has committed a \$500,000 grant to the effort, and Marjorie Fisher, widow of the late philanthropist and businessman Max Fisher, has donated \$200,000.

Led by **Compuware**, about a dozen local employers so far have committed \$80,000 and pledged

to hire 30 young people without subsidies.

"Additionally, summer jobs bring much-needed income to Detroit families.

According to a **University of Michigan** study of last year's participants, 34.5 percent said they used their paychecks to help their families, Williams said.

More information is available at www.growdetroityoungtalent.org.

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NOTE: Photo and caption added by City Connect Detroit.