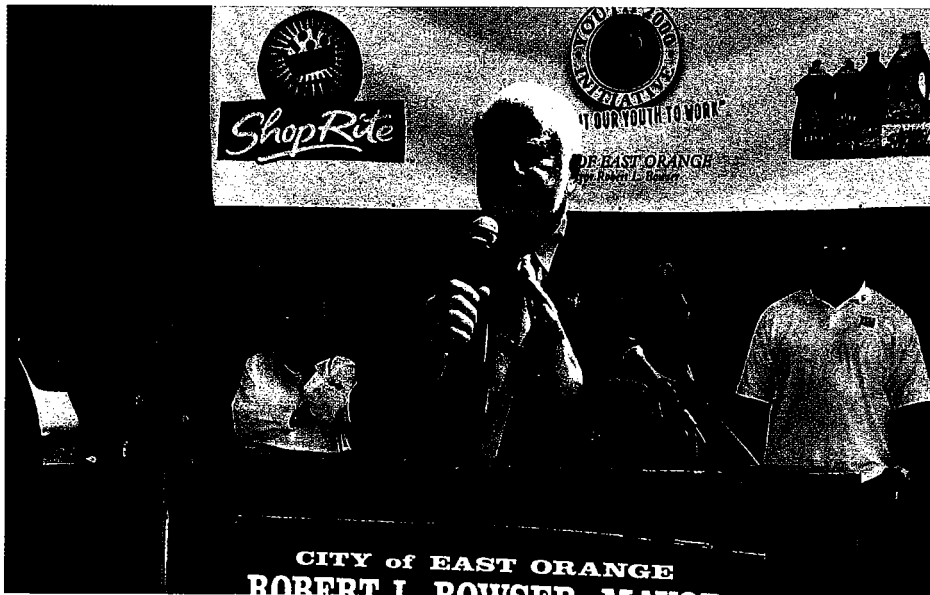


East Orange Puts Its Youth to Work

Robert L. Bowser

Mayor
East Orange



East Orange Mayor Robert L. Bowser addresses young people at the 2004 Colgate P.O.W.E.R. Press Conference and rally held in front of city hall.

Like many communities in urban Essex County, the City of East Orange has faced, over the past 10 years, the crisis of rising youth violence and crime in addition to unemployment, substance abuse, family domestic prob-

part of any crime reduction strategy. If our young people are not in school during school hours or at work, what are they doing? There is sufficient research established that shows that many youth are involved in some level of criminal activity or wrong-doing, some of which

If our young people are not in school during school hours or at work, what are they doing?

lems and an under-performing public educational system. As Mayor, issues of crime and safety in the City of East Orange are a priority of my administration. I believe that youth are an integral

part of any crime reduction strategy. If our young people are not in school during school hours or at work, what are they doing? There is sufficient research established that shows that many youth are involved in some level of criminal activity or wrong-doing, some of which

3:00 and 6:00 p.m., after classes are dismissed for the day. These statistics also show that juvenile crime increases in July and August, when schools are out for summer vacation.

In our community, the public image of young people, much of which is created by the media, primarily consists of youth involved in delinquent behavior or with little interest in personal financial gain. In reality, over three fifths of our teenagers between the ages of 13-18 are involved in activities and services in their communities. By involving youth in our programs and community building efforts, East Orange attempts to change this negative image. We provide work readiness, educational activities, conflict resolution, community involvement and leadership development training through the Youth 2000 Initiative Program.

In 1999, the city established a Youth Development Agenda which included the creation of a year-round Youth Employment and Training Program having two distinct components comprised of other youth development programs.

First, the Summer Work Experience Program (SWEPE) is a six-week summer employment program for East Orange youth between the ages of 14 to 18. The number of youth participating each year is determined by the funds available. Youth are placed largely in public sector jobs, city departments, municipal court, day care, state government and schools.

The Youth 2000 Initiative Program, "Y2" as we like to call it, is the private sector component of the program. It is a year-round employment program serving both in-school and out-of-school

continued on page 48



East Orange youth gather for a press conference and rally in support of the city's Youth 2000 Initiative Program, which supports employment and community involvement.



Young people take advantage of an opportunity to register to vote.

youth between the ages of 16 to 24.

The "Y2" program serves as a comprehensive year-round employment service for youth. The program offers a free referral service, which matches

searches, explore career opportunities and obtain the necessary life skills to successfully sustain meaningful employment. Employers are asked to pledge summer, fall and after-school

Employers are asked to pledge summer, fall and after-school job opportunities.

job-seeking young people with employers. The office is also a "One Stop" Career Center that offers teens and young adults a place to conduct job

job opportunities. Prior to placement with a private sector employer, all youth are required to attend the "Job Smart Academy," a ten-day intensive

pre-employment skills program.

Employers gain a number of advantages by hiring young people enrolled in the Youth 2000 Initiative. One of the key advantages is that participants are pre-screened and instructed on the basics of workplace responsibilities. Our program has received national recognition. In June 2003, the Youth Initiative Program was featured in the Best Practice Center, under the Partnership for Working Families: Successful City Initiatives.

Each year before the start of the Summer Jobs Program a Parent's Forum is hosted by the city to discuss both employment opportunities for youth and the parent's responsibilities in the employment process. The Mayor's office hosts a Kick-Off Breakfast for the Summer Jobs Campaign; community and business leaders are in attendance and pledges of employment for both summer and year-round jobs are solicited. Each year, we invite outstanding members of the business and sports community to co-chair or deliver the campaign kick-off address at the breakfast. In the past such notables as Xerox Corporation executives and New York Giants Football Team members have served as keynote speakers. Our campaign theme is "Remember Your First Break, Remember Your First Job.....Pass It On."

For the past six years, the City of East Orange Youth 2000 Initiative has partnered with the Colgate-Palmolive Company to support youth employment with a \$20,000 annual grant. (\$10,000 in cash and \$10,000 in Colgate Products). I am proud to say that East Orange has achieved distinction as the smallest and the only New Jersey city to participate in the nine-city campaign (the others are Atlanta, Baltimore, Chicago, Detroit, Houston, Philadelphia, Memphis and Los Angeles).

Providing youth with positive alternatives for their futures and an environment in which they can develop requires a commitment to programs, resources and community support. In the past year, our program has served nearly 1,000 young people. Of these, 593 found a place in the workforce because of our efforts. ▲