

ON SITE

Ernest Roberts: A Tribute to a Passionate At-Risk Community Advocate



Ernest Roberts

Ernest Roberts, the original PVJOBS Executive Director who spent two decades in this role to help transform lives through groundbreaking job programs for the at-risk community, has sadly passed away. Roberts died on November 17 at his Running Springs home following a long illness.

A trailblazer who helped create transformative construction job programs to rehabilitate the lives of at-risk

individuals, Roberts served as the rock of PVJOBS since its founding in 1998. As its inaugural leader, Roberts fiercely guided the organization from its early stages as a burgeoning nonprofit to becoming a national model for job programs serving at-risk communities.

Roberts, who was once considered at-risk himself due to his past incarceration and drug use, maintained a special connection with PVJOBS participants since he often understood their struggles on a personal level. His determination to succeed, despite his past, was an inspiration to many, having rebuilt his own life by earning a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology

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from USC before taking the helm of the newly formed PVJOBS organization and leading it to great heights.

“No one understood the needs of the people we serve at PVJOBS more than Ernest. He was committed to making sure that everyone got a second chance and was, himself, a model for how hard work and dedication can result in lives that are changed forever,” said Mary Taylor, who currently serves as the PVJOBS Executive Director. “PVJOBS expanded and succeeded because of his vision, and everyone who has come through our doors looking for a second chance owes him a debt of gratitude.”

During the beginning years of the organization, PVJOBS Board President Valerie Lynne Shaw began working with Roberts while she served as a commissioner for the Los Angeles City Department of Public Works. Shaw remembers Roberts as a passionate activist who sought to build relationships with leaders in both the public and private sectors to help broker landmark agreements that led them to launching hiring programs for their large development projects. “Ernest Roberts was our own community-based renaissance man. He used his multiple talents to change lives and improve neighborhoods,” said Shaw. “He used his life force to help thousands of people, so it’s clear that his work lives on. He was a gift to us all.”

Roberts had more than 25 years of experience in the technical and construction fields. He once owned and operated The House Doctor, a construction and home improvement services business that exclusively hired at-risk individuals. He also served as the President of the West Los Angeles College PACE Alumni Association.

Upon hearing the news of Roberts’ death, an outpouring of heartfelt messages were expressed by PVJOBS staff, board and a host of community supporters who treasured Roberts for being a courageous and compassionate advocate for rehabilitative job programs as well as a true pioneer in this movement. “Ernest never saw people for what they were, but rather saw them for what they could become,” said Taylor. “His life was spent helping people overcome their history of poverty, drug abuse, incarceration and more, knowing that they could create new careers and new lives through PVJOBS. He will be sorely missed, but his legacy will live on in each family he has touched and in each new career he has sparked.”

PVJOBS Donates 800 Turkeys to Residents in Need

PVJOBS staff, program participants and volunteers handed out about 800 free turkeys and other food items to local residents in need during the organization’s



PVJOBS staff, program participants and volunteers gather before kicking off the annual turkey giveaway event.

annual turkey giveaway. The event is held each year at PVJOBS’ South Los Angeles headquarters to offer Thanksgiving meals to low-income families.

Hundreds of residents lined a full block to await their turn to receive a free turkey and traditional holiday foods during the giveaway. Also, a drive-thru pick-up service was offered to enable drivers to receive their turkeys while stationed in their cars. Social distancing protocols were followed to ensure that the event was safe for community members as well as PVJOBS workers and volunteers.

“In this season of giving, we hold our annual turkey giveaway as a demonstration of our goodwill to our community,” said PVJOBS Executive Director Mary Taylor. “By giving away food and necessities to our South L.A. neighbors in need, we’re broadening our mission of impacting lives.”

The event was made possible by Hensel Phelps, which has sponsored the turkey giveaway over the past 11 years. Other collaborative partners include Brown Bag Lady, Gang Reduction Youth Development, Learn4Life, Los Angeles County Probation Department, Los Angeles Police Department, NDICA, Office of Los Angeles City Councilman Curren D. Price Jr. (District 9), Resilient, and Volunteers of America Los Angeles.

PVJOBS Workers at The Grand L.A. Project

PVJOBS has placed more than 100 workers at The Grand L.A. development project since breaking ground in 2018. Here are inspirational stories shared by two PVJOBS workers assigned to the project.



Ricardo Arellano

Working as a drywall carpenter for The Grand L.A. development project may not be his first job, but Ricardo Arellano’s working experience there means that it’ll definitely not be his last. Arellano previously worked for six years as a meat cutter for Ralph’s Supermarket. But after getting in trouble that led to a six-year prison sentence, he found himself virtually unemployable following his release. Thankfully, a halfway house that helped him transition back into the workforce introduced him to PVJOBS. Although the pandemic hit about that time, he forged on with the pre-apprenticeship training, earning multiple construction-related certifications. He was hired to work at The Grand L.A. a month later, a job that has been a refreshing one for him. “This project has been good, there’s a lot of work and opportunity for overtime,” he said. “I’m physically working in open space, which I like.”



Donesha West

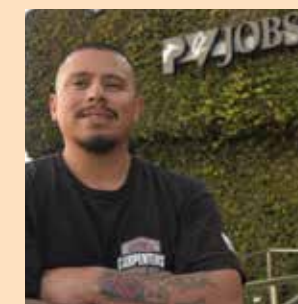
Working in the male-dominated construction industry doesn’t faze Donesha West, a carpentry apprentice for The Grand L.A. development project. “Being that I’m a woman, I think it’s really dope,” she said. “It boosts your ego.” And a confidence boost is something that West could use, given her troubled past. West spent two consecutive prison sentences during her 20s before vowing to never return to the lifestyle that led her there. “I didn’t want to live like that anymore,” she confides. After her release, she found work in warehousing, but the work didn’t resonate as a career path. So when she learned about PVJOBS through a transitional housing program, she took advantage of the opportunity. Days after completing the Construction 101 course, she was offered a job at The Grand L.A. Since working at the development project, West has become a member of the Carpenters Union. She feels like the sky’s the limit for her future in construction, as she aspires to become a superintendent one day.

SoFi Stadium Worker Story: Kenneth Pojoy

Here’s one story of a PVJOBS worker who shared how the job program made a difference in his life by preparing him for the construction project at SoFi Stadium – a project based in his own hometown of Inglewood.

Born and bred in Inglewood, carpenter Kenneth Pojoy felt a strong sense of pride having worked at the SoFi Stadium development project. “It felt good to do something for my community,” said Pojoy, who worked on the stadium’s intricate roofing during its construction. “It was my way of giving back to the community.”

Pojoy feels indebted to his community, given that so many others have invested in his life to help him succeed as a construction worker. Pojoy shared that he often got into trouble during his youth, eventually resulting in his incarceration. By the time he was released, he was a young father who needed to get a job to support his two boys. Struggling to find work, particularly due to his incarceration record, his job search nearly seemed hopeless until his sister Arlin told him about PVJOBS. He soon applied to the job program, enrolling in their construction training course that led to his eventual union membership. PVJOBS then placed him on a number of construction projects over the next decade.



Kenneth Pojoy

After working on a downtown L.A. development project, a foreman acknowledged Pojoy’s hard work and recommended that he join them on their next construction project at SoFi Stadium. Pojoy jumped at the opportunity. “I’m amazed at the final project,” he said. “Now when I go to the stadium, I can feel the energy. I can point to so many things that I worked on.”

Pojoy’s enriching construction experience has inspired him to continue his education to further his carpentry career. While he attended Inglewood’s Morningside High School during his teenage years, he never graduated. So he plans to return to school to earn his GED. He says that completing high school will support his endeavor of one day becoming a project manager.

PVJOBS Meets with U.S. Secretary of Labor

PVJOBS staff recently met with U.S. Labor Secretary Marty Walsh at The Grand L.A. development project for a roundtable discussion: *Power of Apprenticeships – Women Building The Grand L.A.* The roundtable was moderated by PVJOBS Executive Director Mary Taylor, who was joined by three PVJOBS participants representing various trades.



PVJOBS Executive Director Mary Taylor shakes hands with U.S. Labor Secretary Marty Walsh at the roundtable event at The Grand L.A.

The event highlighted more than 60 women working in construction apprenticeships at The Grand L.A. U.S. Deputy Secretary of Labor Julie Su and L.A. County Supervisor Hilda Solis also participated in the roundtable discussion along with numerous labor partners.

PVJOBS Hosts Free COVID-19 Vaccination Event

To support health and wellness in South Los Angeles, PVJOBS recently partnered with the County of Los Angeles Public Health and the Ninth District Office of Los Angeles City Councilman Curren Price to provide COVID-19 vaccinations to community residents. The free vaccination event was held in September at the PVJOBS headquarters.



Local residents await their vaccination at the recent PVJOBS wellness event.

As part of the event, PVJOBS hosted booths to hand out community information about local assistance programs.

An In-N-Out Burger food truck also was stationed on site to encourage community participation.

PVJOBS collaborated with the Los Angeles Black Probation Officers Association to organize the vaccination event. Other event partners included the County of Los Angeles Probation Department, Learn4Life Alta Vista Charter School, and Resilient.

PVJOBS Welcomes Newest Board Member: Cari Hildebrandt



Cari Hildebrandt

Earlier this year, PVJOBS welcomed Cari Hildebrandt as the newest member of their board. Hildebrandt formerly served as the Acting Associate Dean of Community and Contract Education at West Los Angeles College, where she worked with local businesses, nonprofits and community organizations to identify training needs and

forge cooperative partnerships to create solutions. In this position, she served as the point of contact for workforce investment boards and networks as well as supplemental job disability benefit counselors, and she oversaw the college's contracts with the Los Angeles County Office of Education's Welfare-to-Work Program.

Prior this role, Hildebrandt was a founding staffer and ultimately the Director of Westside Extension, in which she created and coordinated a community education program for more than 1,500 offerings each year, serving approximately 4,500 community members, ages 2 to 82. She also served as a Council Leader for the Association of Community and Continuing Education, and she is a former member of a task force working with the California Community College Chancellor's Office on guidelines for community education. Additionally, Hildebrandt served on the board of the Classified Managers Association for the Los Angeles Community College District.

Hildebrandt holds a Bachelor's Degree in Interpersonal Communications from UCLA, and she earned a Master's Degree in Educational Administration, Adult and Higher Education from the University of South Dakota.