

## High School Summer Intern has 'Life Changing' Experience at Holder Construction

*By Irene Wazgowska, CEFGA Feature Writer*

At 16, Clarence Richardson has a plan for his future that very few his age do.

This high school junior transferred to Maynard H. Jackson High School at the beginning of the school year so that he'd have a better start at things. He'd heard of the Engineering and Early College Program at Maynard, and knew that the goals he's set for himself would be more easily met at his new school.

But before this fall, there was the summer that was "life changing."



In the spring of his sophomore year, Clarence participated in the ACE – Atlanta Mentor Program and applied for CEFGA's Summer Internship Program. He was given two different telephone numbers, one of which was John Mark Wood, a vice president with Holder Construction Company.

After getting accepted into the internship program, it wasn't long before he got a call telling him that he'd been hired and was going to work at America's Mart in downtown Atlanta.

In May, Clarence started his internship with Holder Construction Company, a long-time CEFGA member company. A few months prior he'd been "excited" about the opportunity to apply for the internship with CEFGA, never guessing that it: "would be the best thing that could've happened to [him]."

Every morning, Clarence would arrive by MARTA train, 15-17 minutes earlier than his 7 a.m. work day required. This was his first step in the "lesson of a good work ethic."

When he arrived at work, Clarence would meet with his coworkers and Project Superintendent, Corey Reece, at which time the crew would "discuss what needed to be done, or what everybody was going to be doing." For Clarence, 'doing' meant pouring over pages of punchlist items. The punchlist, as Clarence puts it, is "a list of different things that haven't been done properly or haven't been done yet." They are the "fine details" that can't be overlooked.



Over the course of the summer, Clarence checked over hundreds of details. He remembers how punchlists nine and ten were like small magazines. But quality control wasn't the only job he had, the company "had him involved in quite a lot of things."

Clarence's hands-on experience included the opportunity to work with a jackhammer, grinder, and when the sprinkler system temporarily broke - a shop vacuum. And his fear of heights was quickly overcome when he had to climb ladders and work on the roof.

How did Clarence become interested in construction? When he found that ROTC wasn't the program he wanted to participate in, Clarence entered a drafting class at his previous high school, Booker T. Washington. He fell in love and became involved in anything that might further him in the construction world. This included becoming a member of the ACE – Atlanta Mentor Program, which later led to his involvement in the CEFGA Summer Internship.

Clarence not only proved to himself that he was capable of learning new things

(especially gaining a "better understanding of how things are built and put together"), but made a lasting impression on those he worked with as well.

Corey is full of compliments, saying: "Clarence is a fine young man. He was at work everyday, on time, and never had any complaint. He was eager to learn." The Project Superintendent sees a bright future for his intern: "Clarence demonstrates the desire for knowledge and success. I believe he has the drive it takes to be successful in the business world."

Corey "would like to see Clarence return to Holder." He wants Clarence to "see another side of the business." "He got to experience the field side in this internship. He should have the opportunity to see the office side."

And that's just what Clarence intends to do. He'll return to Holder this coming summer and the following as well. In fact, he sees himself with the company for a long time to come. He's planning on attending Southern Polytechnic State University and majoring in Architecture after high school. He hopes to return to Holder after securing his degree.

Maintaining a relationship with Holder is important to Clarence, as is maintaining his friendship with James Nunnally, the Interior Superintendent from the job. James was not only Clarence's mentor, but both agree "a father figure." James laughs and says that "once he got with me, he didn't want to work with anyone else." He recalls how this "very sharp kid," could point out things that only a seasoned professional would have an eye for.

But his obvious talent didn't stop James from giving him advice. James told Clarence: "First things first. Continue your schooling and be as involved in anything you can that concerns your endeavors." And to "make the best of everything," so that Clarence can "be the best [he] can be."

Clarence's grandfather, Caldwell Cunningham, is equally encouraging. He tells his grandson: "if he's going to do it - do it to the best of his abilities at all times."

Clarence can't complain about the perks of his job. Aside from the responsibilities he learned on site, there were other lessons as well. With a steady pay check, Clarence knew it was important to open a bank account. Now he's got a checking account that provides him with some financial freedom. He's not a big spender, but admits he bought a thing or two, most notably his Sidekick phone.

Talking about his involvement with the internship, the experiences he's had, and the friendships he's made brings a smile to Clarence's face. He recognizes how it has been "a wonderful opportunity for someone as young as [himself.]"

And what could be more rewarding than finding something he "could see himself doing every day for the rest of his life...?"

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