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Green collar jobs in Puerto Rico: A well kept secret or are people simply misinformed? [1]

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By MM Sierra Caribbean Net News Puerto Rico Correspondent miranda@caribbeannetnews.com [2] SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico: Although “green collar jobs” have existed in Puerto Rico for over ten years many people don’t know what the job title means and don’t realize that the existing jobs on the island could possibly become the industry of the future. “Green Collar Jobs” have been around for a while, quietly tucked in Puerto Rican businesses, municipalities and non-profit sectors. The fact is that most Puerto Ricans, even those that are “green collar workers,” are unaware that they are in fact “green collar employees.” “This is the first time I hear that our jobs are ‘green collar jobs’,” Renewable Energy Solutions Engineering Associate Ernesto Rivera said. But what exactly do “green collar workers” do? Well, for starters, “green collar workers” are eco-friendly professionals that try to find solutions to help solve the global warming predicament. Solar Panels. Photo courtesy of Casa Solar Business in Puerto Rico Wikipedia -- an online free encyclopedia -- describes “green collar workers” as professionals employed in the environmental sectors of the economy, or in the agricultural sector. “Environmental green-collar workers satisfy the demand for green development. Generally, they implement environmentally conscious design, policy, and technology to improve conservation and sustainability. Formal environmental regulations as well as informal social expectations are pushing many firms to seek professionals with expertise with environmental, energy efficiency, and clean renewable energy issues. They often seek to make their output more sustainable, and thus more favorable to public opinion, governmental regulation, and the Earth's ecology,” states Wikipedia’s online page on “green collar jobs.” From recycling operations and renewable energy sources to green building construction and solar panel installation, “green collar jobs” are fashionably growing and will most likely become the most productive industry in Puerto Rico as the government and private sector are starting to understand the rising public concern regarding environmental issues and the need to create these kinds of jobs to help boost the economy and preserve the environment. In fact, lawmakers are considering a bill that would force all future public buildings to be “green developments.” Bicycle repair, hazardous material clean-up, landscaping, parks and open space expansion and maintenance, solid waste disposal are other examples of “green collar jobs” in

Puerto Rico. The term “Green Collar Jobs” was first pointed out in Alan During’s book called “Green Collar Jobs.” And even as these jobs have been growing at a fast pace in the United States and in Puerto Rico, the fact is that “green collar jobs” have existed since the 1960’s, in countries like Germany and Spain, where thousands of jobs in the wind turbine industry have existed since then. According to the Canadian Centre for Energy Information, an informational center on renewable energy sources, German inventor Ulrich Hutter developed an advanced horizontal axis turbine design that provided greater operating efficiencies in the wind turbine industry. Germany also started the green roof movement in the 1960’s. Non-Profit Organizations also help train and educate people on green collar job creation Puerto Rico also has a number of non-profit eco-friendly organizations staffed by thousands of volunteers and other salaried “green worker” jobs such as environmental specialists, conservation trainers and conservation organizers. Some of the eco-friendly non-profit organizations on the island include The Sierra Club of Puerto Rico, Vecinos de la Parguera, Mayagüezanos Por la Salud y el Ambiente, Movimiento de Mayagüez Pro Desarrollo del Oeste, Junte Ambiental, Rescate Playas Isabela, Scuba Dogs Society and Asociación Puertorriqueña de Energía Verde. Recently a coalition of environmental, architectural and social groups was formed to educate island mayors and residents on how to fight global warming by installing solar water heaters, improve recycling and waste production and help reduce electric bills by installing energy efficiency appliances. The group aims at lobbying so that all 78 municipalities can establish standards and public policies for increasing the use of renewable energies like solar and wind, among others. By informing mayors about renewable energy sources and other environmental friendly steps they should take, hundreds of jobs will be created in each town and at the same time help conserve the environment. Puerto Rico’s “Green Collar Workers” statistics Although there are no official statistics in Puerto Rico regarding how many “green collar jobs” exist, Caribbean Net News conducted an elaborate study and compiled statistics by contacting all 78 municipalities to see how many employees work in the town’s recycling departments. We also gathered information from the Labor and Human Resources Department finding a fairly accurate estimate on how many “green collar jobs” exist on the island. However, according to experts, there are more “green collar jobs” in Puerto Rico than those included in the Labor and Human Resources Department Statistical Study. The total number of “green collar workers” employed by the municipality’s recycling departments are 1,434. The towns with the most recycling jobs are: Carolina with some 220 workers, Guaynabo with some 75 workers in the municipality’s recycling division, Toa Baja which employs 67 workers, San Juan with some 49 workers and Caguas with some 45 workers. “Green Collar Jobs” in the municipalities include the recycling truck drivers, labor workers -- that actually pick up the recycled material and place it in the trucks -- the department’s director, coordinator and a secretary. Among the items the municipal “green collar workers” recycle are glass and plastic bottles, aluminum cans and aluminum foil, shredded paper, cardboard, newspapers, metal cans, phone books, paper bags and magazines. The municipalities offer recycling services to the town’s schools, businesses and communities. Some towns even offer seminars to students to better educate them about the importance of recycling and “helping save the earth.” It should be noted that Guaynabo’s Recycling Program was one of 11 Environmental Quality Board 2008 Award Winners in Puerto Rico. According to a press release issued by EPA, “the goal of Guaynabo is to make a positive contribution to the solid waste disposal problem in Puerto Rico.” “The municipality has approved a local ordinance to enforce its recycling initiative, which requires the participation of all local residents, businesses and industries. Guaynabo residents and institutions have helped achieve the goal of recycling 35% of the solid waste that is received in the local landfill. Since its inception in 2003, the Municipality of

Guaynabo's recycling program has become a model for other municipalities," reads EPA's press release. Puerto Rico also counts on an array of trained academic "green collar" specialists According to the Labor and Human Resources Department Puerto Rico has some 44,570 "green collar workers." The Labor Department describes these jobs as "Occupations in Cleaning and Maintenance of Buildings and Green Areas." Puerto Rico also has many trained academic "green specialists" already incorporated in the workforce. These include 110 Natural Science Managers; 320 Landscape and Marine Architects; 40 Agricultural Engineers, 510 Chemical Engineers; 160 Medicine Scientists; 680 Environmental and Health Science Specialists; 40 Hydrologists and Geographers; 80 Agriculture and Food Science Technicians; 200 Environmental Protection, Health and Science Technicians. Other "green collar workers" in Puerto Rico include 120 Nuclear Science Technology Specialists; 500 Green Area Maintenance Supervisors; 6,580 Green Area and Landscape Maintenance Labor Workers; 290 Tree Cutting and Pruning Workers; 140 Agriculture Inspectors; 1,670 Solid Waste Disposal Operators and 2,570 Recycling and Reuse Workers. In total, according to Labor Department Statistics and the 78 municipalities recycling division workers, Puerto Rico has some 60,014 trained "green collar workers." Puerto Rico has hundreds of other "green collar workers" working in a myriad of eco-friendly companies. For example, there are over 50 Environmental Consulting Service Companies, including: Analytical Environmental Services International Inc.; Aqua Clean Ships Caribe Inc. and Caribbean Waste Consultants. There are over seven Environmental Labs including Acualab de Puerto Rico Inc. and Environmental Health and Safety Services. Puerto Rico has some 45 Recycling Services Companies such as Alternative Fuels; Allied Waste of Puerto Rico Inc, the Salinas Recycling Plant and Ricoh Puerto Rico. And, there are about 37 Solar Heating Equipment Suppliers and Renewable Energy businesses in Puerto Rico including, Energia 2000; El Sol de PR; Renewable Energy Solutions Engineering; Casa Solar and EcoUrbana just to name a few. The possibilities of creating more "green collar jobs" are endless. But stricter public policies and programs to force investment into targeted green economic activity for local "green workers" need to be enacted One key problem in Puerto Rico is the high cost of fuel so if Puerto Rico becomes energy independent, people and businesses will save a lot of money and it will help create thousands of jobs in the renewable energy sources sector alone. For example, if Puerto Rico engages in promoting the creation of wind farms, thousands of jobs could be created in areas such as: sheet metal workers; machinists and truck drivers. If the government and the people demand the creation of private and public buildings or refurbishing homes, businesses and public buildings, thousands of jobs could be created by retrofitting buildings that would need roofers, insulators, building inspectors and construction workers to the develop the projects. "Public policy has to be directed towards renewable energy. Energy is the engine of the island…We need to tie the island's economic development with renewable energy," Rivera said. Casa Solar Business Associate Lino Aponte is quite optimistic about the possibilities "green collar jobs" could bring to an island currently struggling to create more job opportunities. "I think the green industry is already the industry of the future, pretty soon 80 percent of the island will be using green systems…from renewable energy sources, to green buildings and other green projects," Aponte said. While EcoUrbana Business Associate Rogelio Figueroa, who is also the Puerto Ricans for Puerto Rico Party President, told Caribbean Net News that if 50 green homes are built each year about 120,000 new jobs could be created including "green collar" carpenters, electricians and construction workers among others. Figueroa said that car mechanics can also become "green collar workers" by modifying cars to hydrogen cars. By modifying cars into a hydrogen-technology consumers will save money on gas by using water. According to e-zinearticles.com, while you will still need to use regular fuel, the energy efficiency of hydrogen will help increase mileage. In fact

the energy density of hydrogen is more than twice as much as the energy density of oil or gas. “I already know of three people that are not mechanics, but understand the concept, that did the conversion themselves. Converting a vehicle to a hydrogen car is not a very complex process” Figueroa said. “Thousands of other mechanical jobs can be created if more and more people decide to invest in converting their cars to hybrid or electric cars. This will help the environment, create jobs and nourish the island’s economy.” According to Figueroa within the next ten years over 300,000 jobs can be created in the renewable energy, lands, wind mills, car conversion and green homes and buildings industries, just to name a few. Creating more “Green Collar Jobs” could be Puerto Rico’s pathway out of a stagnant economy Puerto Rico is in dire need of channeling the currently out of work professionals and the vast amount of people in the underground economy into the labor market by they themselves creating “green collar jobs.” There are a number of government aids that can help the underground economy people and those out of work to begin their own “green collar businesses.” For example, the Key to Your Business, which grants up to $50,000 financing to those who qualify and the Women in Business Loans which offers up to $200,000 in financing to women aspiring to establish their own business. Just a few months ago the new Economic Incentives Law went into effect. The law offers the same incentives to local and foreign companies and one of its perks is that it specifically grants credits to companies investing in renewable energy hence helping create more “green collar jobs.” Although the “green collar jobs” industry in Puerto Rico is looking towards a bright future, a consensus between the public and private sector has to be reached to help boost the island’s economy forward and so the people can live in a safer and healthier island. “The time to create more green collar jobs is now…the high costs of energy is forcing us to look into renewable energy and other environmental friendly businesses. If the people, the government and the private sector combine efforts and move towards a green economy we can all create a more secure future both financially and environmentally speaking,” Rivera said.

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