

Stimulus road workers happy to be back on job

New Hampshire Avenue popular set for TV crews

by C. Benjamin Ford | Staff writer, The Gazette

When American Infrastructure won the contract to repave a section of New Hampshire Avenue, Bryan White, 47, of Aberdeen, was one of the employees who got the call to return to work.

"It's wonderful," White said of the project, cited as the first in the nation under the \$26.6 billion released by President Barack Obama from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act to state and local governments to repair and build roadways and bridges. "It's going to create more jobs. I know I'm happy."



Dan Gross/The Gazette

A road crew mills the road surface on New Hampshire Ave in Silver Spring. The one-mile stretch to be resurfaced is the first project in the nation funded by Obama's stimulus package.

White is usually laid off during the winter months due to the seasonal nature of his job, but with the economy in the tank and state and county governments cutting back on infrastructure work, he had feared that his layoff would be extended.

"Now I'm getting caught up on bills," he said. "That's the big thing right now."

When American Infrastructure submitted the low bid for the \$1.8 million project to resurface the 1.1-mile stretch of New Hampshire Avenue, the company never expected the project would draw national attention, said Mark Compton, director of government affairs for American Infrastructure.

"We had no idea this would be the first one," he said.

Maryland moved ahead of other states by bidding out the projects even before the stimulus package passed Congress, with the caveat that the contract was subject to congressional passage, he said.

"We knew we were bidding at risk, but it was a risk we were willing to take," Compton said. "As a management team, we're not going to sleep until we get all of our guys working again." The company employs about 1,800, including 320 in Maryland.

As the first of the "shovel ready" projects to be funded with the federal stimulus money, the New Hampshire Avenue workers have been visited by crews from Good Morning America and CNN, said project superintendent John Greenwald.

"It's good for people to see where the money is going," Greenwald said. "The guys we have are great. It's good we have them back to work. American Infrastructure is like a big family, and it's good to get them back to work."

The funds not only allowed the company to bring back 20 people who had been laid off to work on the project, it will repair a road badly in need of fixing, Greenwald said. The project will employ 60 people over the course of the contract. The project is expected to take until September.

The pavement above the concrete is cracked deeply at the concrete's seams due to a combination of heavy traffic and weather. Patches are only a short-term solution. The old pavement will be milled down before the new surface is applied. The company also will repair the curbs and disability ramps.

"The need is there for the infrastructure work," Greenwald said. "The State Highway (Administration) doesn't just put a Band-Aid on it. They do it right."

Ray Walsh, a subcontractor driving a sweeper truck, said he had not been laid off, but was beginning to worry that he would be until the New Hampshire Avenue project came along.

"So, it was getting scary there," he said.

Tim Radel, 27, an equipment operator with American Infrastructure, said being called means a lot.

"We're just lucky we're one of the first ones back to work," he said.

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