

LRR FOCUS: Economic Development Initiatives

The Garment Industry Development Corporation (GIDC) was set up in New York City in 1984, and is governed by a tripartite board of the ILGWU, industry, and the City of New York. Initially, GIDC's efforts were geared to protecting garment shops and the jobs of union members from rent-gouging landlords in New York's over-heated real estate market. Subsequently, GIDC developed skills upgrading programs for sewing machine operators, pattern graders and small contractors. Its popular "Super Sewers" program provides eight weeks of intensive training on every sewing operation involved in making garments and includes English-as-a-Second language instruction. The program prepares operators for better-paying jobs in shops producing higher-value garments.

To identify market and technology strategies to improve the long-term viability of New York apparel firms, GIDC undertook an extensive two-year study. The report was completed in the spring of 1992 and GIDC and the ILGWU have begun to implement several of the report's recommendations, including the "Fashion Quick Response" project. GIDC is also establishing a quality improvement program involving shop stewards, manufacturers and their contractors.

To address the day care needs of garment workers, the overwhelming majority of whom are women, GIDC conducted a survey of garment employers and several thousand ILGWU Chinese and Hispanic members to document the character and extent of the need for day care centers. The union was the driving force behind the establishment of the Chinatown Day Care Center in 1984 and launched efforts to establish two additional centers in New York City. In several public policy forums, GIDC and the union have pressed the case for greater public support for child care for the children of blue collar women.

In the Fall River-New Bedford area of Massachusetts, the ILGWU helped establish the Needle Trades Action Project (NTAP) in 1985 with state support, and included the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union and the men's clothing industry from that area. NTAP set up a program to train "para-engineers" to provide employers with greater in-house expertise on efficient work flow and compensation systems.

To further expand the geographic reach of such efforts and to begin to develop more comprehensive programs, a national labor-



Graduate of "Super Sewer" class wearing coat she made.

management committee for the women's and children's apparel industry was formed in 1989, by the union and several industry associations. Known as the Council for American Fashion (CAF), this group has formed a series of area committees as the organizational vehicles for addressing local apparel industry development problems.

The ILGWU—from top officers to regional directors to local leadership—has consistently spearheaded these efforts, and in every case, the union is actively involved in determining priorities and implementation.

Finally, the ILG has been the leading advocate for manufacturing jobs in New York City where financial and real estate sectors have long opposed manufacturing. The union has fought for commercial rent regulation and for zoning protections to preserve affordable space for manufacturing activities, especially in Manhattan, where two-thirds of the city's garment manufacturing takes place. The union sought public support for a manufacturing sector that provides thousands of jobs for women, minorities, and recent immigrants while the city's economic development efforts lavished tax breaks and subsidies on real estate developers who sought to gentrify Manhattan's economic base. The city has lost 150,000 or one-third of its manufacturing jobs since 1980.