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COVID-19 Heroes: The essential workers keeping buildings clean

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Charmaine Jones (left); Bill Raese

COVID-19 HEROES

In the world-changing fight against the coronavirus, heroes take many shapes. Crain's wants to recognize some of the people who are stepping up, in ways big and small. If you know a COVID-19 Hero, email crainsdetroit@crain.com and tell us their story.

Charmaine Jones wakes at 5 a.m. every day in her west side Detroit home.

Jones, a 28-year-old lifelong city resident and mother of two young girls, is just one of the many building maintenance and cleaning crew workers that are considered essential employees by the state.

As untold numbers of office workers around Michigan are working from home under Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's stay-at-home order, Jones and the 90 other Bedrock LLC day porters and those employed by other real estate companies to keep office buildings up and running don't have the same flexibility.

Although sparser crowds pass through office buildings these days, they must be maintained for the few still working in them.

For Jones, who started at Dan Gilbert's Detroit-based real estate company in October 2016, each day brings a new set of challenges with schools shuttered for the remainder of the academic year. She has to arrange for family to watch her two girls, ages 3 and 5, during her work day, which runs from around 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

"Sometimes it's a struggle, sometimes it's not," Jones said.

And although Bedrock is providing Lyft ride-sharing service vouchers to its workers who have to be on-site daily, sometimes drivers aren't available when she needs to leave in the morning, leaving her daily commute in flux.

In spite of the difficulties — which also include making ends meet as a single mother — Jones says she enjoys what she does and is thankful for her coworkers.

"People may feel like they're not appreciated, but I appreciate them," she said.

Bill Raese, supervisor of day porters and general maintenance for Southfield-based Continuum Services LLC, a subsidiary of Southfield-based developer and landlord Redico LLC, said that he and his 17 workers have been cleaning in largely empty buildings.

"In some cases, there's maybe one or two tenants in a 10-floor office building or even a 20-floor office building, down to one or two tenants," he said.

"We've evolved to the point where we're doing a little different type of work but we are doing a lot more work in regards to disinfecting. Three times a day, we go through and disinfect door handles, elevator buttons, elevator walls, handrails, restrooms."

And for Pamela Owens-Moore, a janitor of 32 years who currently works in the Millender Center downtown and is executive board member of the SEIU Local 1 union, things have

changed the last several weeks.

"It's different being there," she said. "It feels different, it feels scary ... I don't think people think our lives matter. When I come out of that building, I'm a mother, a grandmother, an aunt. A lot of janitors take the bus to work and they are fearful."

Inline Play

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