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HERO NEWS



THE GREATER BALTIMORE COMMITTEE

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This week, *Hero News* pays tribute to a local organization helping the Baltimore area adapt for the future. In the traditionally divided business community of Baltimore, the Greater Baltimore Committee (GBC) is focused on bringing leaders of different backgrounds together. The GBC has taken this claim as a mission. This is not a favor or a handout. Instead the organization works to nurture partnerships between majority corporations and minority and women-owned business.

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people who might never meet in social settings.

"I am acutely aware of our endeavor to get more minorities and women on our board," GBC's Executive Director of Communications says noting the organizational commitment to diversity. The partnership with minority business and local hospitals is another spotlight.

"Statistically, we have doubled the amount of purchases from minority suppliers over the past 5 years," Brucken adds. In September, the GBG and five of the region's top health care institutions and Greater hosted a healthcare vendor fair at the University of Maryland, Baltimore.

This five-year program is called Bridging the Gap. Among other things, it spotlights successful majority-minority business collaborations like Forest City-New East Baltimore Partnership. This partnership between national developer Forest City and Presidential Partners, a group of locally-owned minority developers and builders, was formed to help acquire and transform 31 acres in Baltimore City's east side. Bridging the Gap also points to a partnership between the Whiting-Turner Contracting Company and minority owned business Commercial Interiors as a model of the kind of mutually beneficial relationship that builds minority business development. The partnership has collaborated on numerous high profile projects including the Arundel Mills Mall, Morgan State University and the renovation of the Hippodrome Theatre.

The Whiting-Turner-Commercial Interiors partnership was organized and promoted by GBC Leadership graduate Gary Harkness. The Leadership receives 100 applicants for the annual program from which a diverse class of 50 is selected by previous Leadership graduates. Class members are exposed to a year-long education about the Baltimore region and its challenges relating to business climate and quality of life as well as the values of the GBC.

The Bridging the Gap program is also building an inventory of minority owned business. By developing a resource of a highly qualified minority vendors and providing it to majority businesses GBC seeks to introduce peo-

The event was an opportunity to introduce members of the health providers' procurement staffs to more than 100 minority and women entrepreneurs who attended. The fair created an opportunity for the host members to hear and discuss the specific offerings of these small business owners. It was a win-win situation for all participants. "Institutional purchasing representatives are here to help participants "get better at doing it," rather than talking about it," said Herb Buchanan, senior vice president and COO, of the University of Maryland Medical System. "Today is about relationship business... getting to know us and how you can do business with us," Buchanan adds.

The GBC has encouraged this utilization of minority business in the hospital procurement of services "From the base year to present, there has been roughly a 100 percent increase in the amount of money spent - and this year, the hospitals exceeded \$50 million in spending for the first time," said GBC President Donald Fry. Vice President of General Services Ken Grant, of Johns Hopkins told the group, "This is heavy lifting and we want to work with as many of you as we can."

Each year the GBC gives awards at an annual event, highlighting "best practices" in the area of diversity achievement. These are important events, giving credit to those major and minority business that have

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worked together successfully. "It's important that we nurture minority and women-owned businesses and celebrate their successes because they are vital to the growth of the state's economy," says Sharon Pinder, special secretary, Maryland Governor's Office of Minority Affairs.

The Bridging the Gap initiative, "Include workshops on business planning and financing and networking events aimed at nurturing minority-majority partnerships," Fry adds. The challenge for GBC is changing the old days of hiring practices that did not include minority input and participation. Stereotypes and discrimination has created a barrier for those entrepreneurs who dream and envision their own place in Baltimore to practice and succeed in their own right. In practice, "seeing is believing" and once minority groups can demonstrate their value in the market, everyone will benefit.

"The cause of diversity is widely endorsed in corporate America as the right thing to do," Fry says. "But the real driver of minority business development will be corporate recognition that it makes excellent business sense, and that incorporating diversity into the business plan greatly benefits the bottom line." By creating and distributing a list of minority organizations available for partnerships, the GBC has helped create hope for African-American and woman-owned businesses.