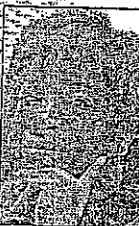


Diversity still a minority for corpo

BY FROM/A1

region's 100 largest employers. The study is being conducted for the Building One Economy Leadership Initiative. That committee of local executives, under the Allegheny Conference on Community Development's Working Together Consortium, promotes having more blacks in corporate leadership and regional planning roles.

"There's been some increase in inclusion of African-Americans in economic decision-making in the region in recent years," said Ralph Bangs, the Pitt research associate writing the study.



Doris Carson Williams, president of the African American Chamber of Commerce of Western Pa., serves on several regional boards, including High of di board



Spencer, vice president and chief administrative officer of Equitable Resources.

Blacks in high posts are nonexistent at West Penn Allegheny Health System. Not a single black person serves on its 11-member board of directors or any of its six member hospitals' boards, according to spokesman Dan Laurent. Of 40 executives at the level of vice

president or higher, none is black.

The sole black director at Mellon Financial Corp., the region's largest corporate employer with about 9,000 local jobs, retired in 2000. Just one of Mellon's 29 senior or executive managers is black, said spokesman Ron Gruendl.

At PNC Financial Services Group, one of 17 board members is black. The company refuses to disclose racial statistics of its top management.

Move down the scale a bit and things get even whiter.

Only one of the 38 mid-sized publicly held companies based in the region — those with annual revenues between \$100 million and \$1 billion — had a black person on its board of directors last year, said Laura Fisher, director of the Working Together Consortium.

"It still seems that when I sit down with top executives, there are (black) people out there in the clerical and entry-level jobs, but there aren't any in the boardroom," said state Rep. Joseph Preston Jr., of East Liberty.

There are so few blacks in top-level executive positions in the region's biggest companies, Equitable's Spencer said, "I can count them all on two hands."

Making sure that blacks — or other minorities, or women — are part of major decision-making groups isn't just a matter of fairness, said Murry Gerber, chief executive of Equitable and Spencer's boss.

Gerber, who is white, said a racial mix in management helps promote an atmosphere where different views are encouraged. That, in turn, spurs creative thinking, which leads to better business decisions, he said.

Soon after he took the helm at Equitable in 1998, Gerber pressed for adding a black member to the board of directors. WQED President and CEO George Miles Jr. came aboard last summer.

"I think that good companies do this," Gerber said. "They value (diversity) because they know the power of it. One can get into ... a mindset in a company that things have always been done a certain way and, therefore, should always be done a certain way. You need to shake that thinking up a little bit."

Pittsburgh's business world isn't the only place where decision makers are mainly white.

A 1999 survey by Bangs found 6 percent of the board seats at Pitts-

burgh's 44 largest economic development agencies — 56 of 880 spots — were held by blacks.

The Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission, which plans major transportation projects and oversees federal highway funds in nine counties, has a 56-member board with not a single black person on it.

"I'll be honest with you, it has not been something that we sit around and think we should be more diverse. That is not the sort of issue that has come up," said Chairman Tom Balya, a Westmoreland County commissioner.

Balya said the absence of blacks isn't intentional. The commission has panels and other initiatives to encourage participation by anyone interested, he said.

Doris Carson Williams, president of the African American Chamber of Commerce of Western Pennsylvania, said she told the commission's former director, Robert Kochanowski, that panels weren't enough. Kochanowski died in August.

"Those are the kinds of things you do to help build a relationship, but that does not take the place of serving on a board," said Carson Williams.

She and other proponents of top-level racial diversity stress there is no lack of candidates. The last count by the U.S. Census Bureau indicated about 10,000 black managerial and professional workers live in Allegheny County.

One problem, many say, is that blacks and whites still don't mix much socially. So when board openings come up, white members are at a loss to name black candidates.

In 1999, the Urban League of Pittsburgh published an "African American Leadership Directory." It contains biographies of 183 likely candidates for positions on boards.

"This gets rid of the excuse, 'I can't find one,'" said Urban League President and CEO Esther Bush.

Bush, Miles and others involved with the directory will meet next week to discuss a second edition, possibly on the Internet.

Because the directory coincided with the Working Together Consortium's efforts to promote diversity through the Building One Economy Committee, the consor-

tium sent out 1,600 copies to Allegheny Conference members.

Each directory came with a promotional letter signed by Miles and USX Corp. CEO Tom Usher, co-chairmen of the consortium's diversity committee.

The consortium focused special attention on mid-size public companies. Several committee executives, including PPG Industries Inc. Chairman and CEO Ray LeBoeuf, called those businesses to offer assistance in locating potential black board members.

LeBoeuf, who is white, said top-level diversity — not only in terms of race and sex, but also in fields of expertise — is a key business strategy at PPG. Two of 10 board members and one of the company's five highest executives are black.

"In Pittsburgh I think, particularly when we get to smaller companies ... the ability to seek out this (racial) diversity can be limited at times. And yet we do have a lot of diversity in the community. So I think it's important to make them aware of who is available right around the corner from where they're located," LeBoeuf said.

Fisher said she knows of 51 instances of blacks joining local boards since the directory went out, and 28 cases of blacks joining public commissions or committees.

Carson Williams praised Usher, who is white, for promoting the directory.

"He didn't have to. He did that because he knew that for the region to move forward, the decision-making process needs to be opened to African-Americans — that the 'old boy' white network should be expanded."

All but two of the new board slots Fisher lists as now held by blacks are unpaid, voluntary posts.

"There's a long fuse for directorships at corporations. Obviously, it's not every two months that they add a new director," she said.

Meanwhile, Spencer is not content to leave it to the big, coordinated efforts to secure minorities a seat at the conference room table.

He and his circle of black executives tap promising young minority managers at work, then counsel them privately about climbing the ladder.

"My driving ambition is making

Diversity still a minority for corporations

By Mark Houser
TRIBUNE-REVIEW

Black History Month

Each Thursday in February, the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review is examining issues in the regional black community as part of the Black History Month coverage.

- Today: Political, corporate clout
- Feb. 15: Crime and justice
- Feb. 22: Economic opportunities

got hit by a car tomorrow, I don't have anybody African-American I can point to and say, 'He or she is ready to replace me,'" Spencer said. "The rest of the people in my

group, many of them said the same thing. So we said we've got to do something about that."

Spencer and others are trying to turn the region's boardrooms and executive offices into less of a study in monochrome. But while some tout early successes, raw numbers suggest it will take many years before blacks can boast of anything approaching proportional representation.

The University of Pittsburgh Center for Social and Urban Research plans to release a study this spring showing how many blacks serve on the boards of the

PLEASE SEE DIVERSITY/A4

s a man who rose from laborer Mon Valley tin warehouse to neighborhood corporate Pittsburgh, g Sp should take pride in accomplishments. s a black man who did it, doubt so. ut Spencer, 51, a senior vice president and chief administrative officer of Equitable Resources Inc., said and other local black executives ded over an informal lunch last that their personal victories aten to ring hollow in the end. am embarrassed to say that if I