

## OESE FOSS

## Afriran American Chamber continues to grow and advocate for members

Courier Staff Writer by Sor., \_ M. Toler

burgh 21, ADVOCATE-

Four years ago when Doris Parson Williams became the hamber of Commerce of outhwestern Pennsylvania, ead of the African American

the organization had a mere 50 members. It had no voice. Now, with its membership numbers approaching 400 busi-

nesses, organizations and pro-fessionals, the so-called "Black Chamber" is growing in clout. A growing membership is also beginning to pay off sub-stantially in the value of the contracts the chamber has \$200 helped facilitate. two and a half years, thamber has tracked a \$200 million in cont . In the past if years, the contracts about

awarded to its members.

To hear Williams tell it, the was even over

organization's 2002 accom-plishments began "before 2001

"Just before the year concluded, the African American Chamber of Commerce led the charge to urge county council to vote down the Living Wage Bill," Williams said.

County council ill, which wou ncil rejected the would have re-

quired the county and its contractors to pay employees a minimum \$9.12 per hour.

At the time, council President Jim Simms said, "As bud-

money to pass on these costs he said. "If we can't now for get chairman, when I began to examine the ramifications looking at a \$30 million budget deficit—we don't have the we can't pay for it, prom

Simms was the original sponsor the bill. The year acoriginal

with portunities business members learning chamber

AGBEDE

Bank at the first powerbreak-fast of the year Bank Chair-man Stephen Steinhour was the guest speaker.

have gone unnoticed by the general community was the lo-cal chamber assisting the start up of the African American Chamber of Commerce of Central Pennsylvania In February, tl An accomplishment that may ave gone unnoticed by the

the chamber

hosting a candidates forum for the highly contested Pitts-burgh City Council race in Dis-trict 9. Former Councilwoman Valerie McDonald Roberts va-cated the seat to tolor cacy on a different level by cated the seat to take a county row office seat as reorder of office

on promoting social e members to relax and his upcoming play "Cons Star," on the life of the Thompson visited a power-breakfast to inform members of also saw the chamber focusing host a performance of the play at the City Theatre. newspaper editor and civil and women's rights advocate, Ida B. Wells. The chamber would later Playwright/director The second month of the year events for "Constant Tazewell network late

"We capped the night off with sweet rewards at dessert reception," Williams remarked. Another February event was a skating day at the new Ice Rink at PPG Place.

the annual business meeting and luncheon.
In April, Morgan Stanlov Williams informed members at "We will do it again next year, don't the date,



THANKS. BILL.—The chamber saluted retiring Congressman Bill Coyne, right. Also shown from left Pittsburgh Councilwoman Twanda Carlisle, NAACP Pittsburgh Branch President Tim Stevens, Allegheny County Recorder of Deeds Valerie McDonald Roberts and Doris Carson Williams.

"The highlight of that month hosted a networking mixer for the chamber at the new Re-

was our statewide candidates forum," Williams said. "The event, hosted by the chamber was televised state wide and included our Gov-elect Ed Rendell. It also featured the candidates for the state House statewide candidates Williams said "The

been in the forefront of supporting small and minority business in Harrisburg, she continued. "He has been a pillar of strength for the chamber..we thank him and wish him well in of Representatives.
"For the past 15 years, chamber member Bill Robinson has his future endeavors.

bid to political newcomer Jake Wheatley, who will be sworn in to office in January.

On the health front, the Robinson lost his re-election

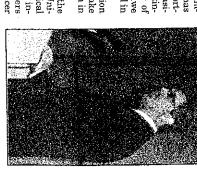
chamber teamed with about the importance of cancer versity of Pittsburgh Medical Center in April to provide in

Board Chairman Agbede said the chamber will become a stronger advocate for its members in the new year.

"We'll try to encourage those who work with us to continue and more involved," said

don't work with us, we'll try to find ways to involve them." and get more involved," Agbede. "And for those

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## aking care of business

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Additionally, he said the chamber will work on compillisting the top company that works with Black-owned busiing its first ever report card nesses and hire Black profes sionals.

are still recovering from being excluded from Plan B (the building boom in the city that say the erection of two new say the erection of two sports stadiums and a convention center among).
"We have to find ways to Agbede said Black businesses new

build lasting capacity, not just some instant gratification,

said. work thus far, which includes ship program, the establishment of a mentorship program, the chamber was nominated by National City Bank as Small Business Advocate of the Year for the won the award in May. Business Administration. It Eastern Region of the Small As a result of its advocacy

served as an opportunity to salute retiring The June Powerbreakfast Congressman

event had chamber members doing business to the rhythm Bill Coyne. That month's networking

event hosted by Agbede. of steel drums, meeting was held in August to ber members. inform members how to maximıze Networking is vital to chamer members. Therefore, a networking opportuni-. during an

up that meeting by hosting a corporate networking mixer at the John Heinz History Center Dominion Peoples followed

which Roger chamber luncheon was held at in September. vice chairman of the Board of serve System, spoke about the economy and "the outlook of Governors of the Federal Renity," as Williams explained it. African-American money matters Then, in November, a special Ferguson, the affecting the commu-

businesses and professionals a voice in formation of the city's Pittsburgh 21, a task force budget proposal as co-chair of city's operational budget. to suggest ways to balance the formed by Mayor Tom Murphy Williams also gave Black

long way," Agbede said, scratching the surface best is yet to come." we're not there yet. We're just "The chamber has come a ."but