

BUSINESS

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POWERBREAKFAST SPEAKER—Allegheny County Chief Executive Dan Onorato reviewed his accomplishments and shared his vision for the region at the African American Chamber of Commerce of Southwestern Pennsylvania's PowerBreakfast meeting.

Onorato shares vision for region, accomplishments

by Sonya M. Toler

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There have been several negative events that affected this region over the last year, but Allegheny County Chief Executive Dan Onorato prefers to focus on the positive.

During a Jan. 21 breakfast meeting of the African American Chamber of Commerce of Western Pennsylvania he said, "We went through a lot of pain in the county last year... We could easily focus on negative things. I refuse to do that. I refuse to accept... at somehow our best days are behind us as a region."

The speech marked Onorato's second appearance before the Black Chamber. He took the opportunity to highlight his accomplishments as it relates to the county's African-American population, which constitutes less than 13 percent according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

Attending the function with Onorato were several of his African-American hires and appointments, including Richard Taylor, Port Authority board member; Tim Johnson, head of administrative services; Ruth Byrd Smith, MBE department director; and Louis "Hop" Kendrick, former county MBE director who now serves as a consultant to address minority contracting and faith-based initiatives.

Of the approximately 150 appointments to boards and authorities Onorato has made, he said 30 percent (approximately 45) have been minority.

Of that number, 33 are female, 25 are younger than 40 and about 17 are Republican.

"When I say diversity, I'm not just talking about African-American," Onorato said. "I'm talking about gender, I'm talking about age."

The Democratic chief executive also shared his pleasure in being able to advance the issue of row office reform, something that has not received se-

rious discussion until now.

Last month, Allegheny County Council voted to put a referendum on the May ballot that, if approved, would reduce the number of elected county row offices from 10 to four. The referendum was approved by all eight council Democrats and two of six Republicans.

However, Onorato admitted that consolidating the row offices would not equate to any "significant savings;" but instead it would "improve efficiency" by merging functions such as purchasing and mailing.

A major story over the past several months has been US Airways. Once the county's major employer, it is struggling to emerge from its second Chapter 11 protection filing.

While on its face the US Airways story is negative, Onorato said several positives have occurred at the airport, from the facility being ranked the best airport by several leading magazines to several low-cost air carriers opening gates at Pittsburgh International Airport. Most recently, Southwest Airlines announced it would be flying out of Pittsburgh. Onorato stressed that no public money was used in the deal.

Southwest's announcement, said Onorato, immediately prompted other airlines to consider Pittsburgh. He would not detail which airlines.

Onorato did say he is focusing on putting infrastructure in the currently vacant 10 acres surrounding the airport.

Additionally, he is working to clean up the nearly 2,000 acres of brownfield sites along the county's riverbanks.

"Every other city in America has decided that the rivers are going to be their best asset," he said. "No business will touch a dirty site."

Ultimately, Onorato believes the city and county

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