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PHOTOS PROVIDED BY AACC

IN APPRECIATION—From left: Bob Agbade joins outgoing AACC board chair Greg Spencer and Chamber president Doris Carson in honoring Marathon Oil Corp. chairman Thomas J. Usher for his many contributions and unparalleled support as founding chair of the Presidential Roundtable.

New board members, chair, tributes announced at Chamber annual meeting

by C. Denise Johnson

Courier Staff Writer

The theme of the day could have been appreciation and aspiration at the annual meeting luncheon of the African-American Chamber of Commerce of Western Pennsylvania.

The sold out May 12 event was held at the Renaissance Pittsburgh Hotel and provided an opportunity to review the accomplishments of the previous year, acknowledge individual accomplishment and establish goals and objectives for the coming year.

In the annual meeting that preceded the luncheon, Chamber President and CEO Doris Carson Williams shared the many strides the Chamber has made over the year, which included a survey of member services to gauge areas for improvement as well as the increase of support from corporate members and others who see the value of affiliation.

Williams cited such initiatives as Ask the Expert, the Business Institute and PowerBreakfasts, as well as an increase in members and

expansion of the chamber's reach to include members in nine counties.

"Instead of asking for assistance, as we did when we started out in 1998, we now have corporations and non-profits calling us to offer services and support," said Williams.

Other highlights included the member's forum for Pittsburgh mayoral candidates, construction industry focus groups and a membership directory.

Williams also thanked outgoing board members Eric Bruce of Trilogic Corp., Al Merritt, MJP Enterprises/McDonalds, Marimba Miliones of Milestone New Media Group and Weida Tucker of W.G. Tucker & Associates.

A staple of annual meetings, the passing of the mantle, had outgoing board president Greg Spencer welcoming his successor, Sam Stephenson of Terry & Stephenson, PC, and incoming board members David Atkins of GO4, Herman Jones, of Urban Market Research, Keith Kinard, of the Housing Authority of Pittsburgh and Irvin Williams of Ebony Development, LLC.

Atkins got a jump on his term by designing

banners to be used at trade fairs and other chamber off-site functions, such as the annual meeting where they were debuted.

During the luncheon, retiring Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra principal pianist Patricia Prattis Jennings was honored for her 40-year tenure as Williams noted, "Musicians are also entrepreneurs."

Luncheon speaker John Suma, chairman and CEO of United States Steel Corp., acknowledged the impact of shifting demographics on future business plans, telling the 250 attendees that increased diversity in employment and procurement is the wave of the future.

Other honorees included Richard Simmons of Allegheny Technologies and Marathon Oil chairman Thomas J. Usher for lending their expertise and influence in brokering involvement of Pittsburgh's many corporations and non-profits to support chamber efforts.

In appreciation for his services as the founding member of the Presidential Roundtable,

SEE CHAMBER C2



FULL HOUSE—A capacity gathering enjoys the repast at the African American Chamber's Annual Meeting Luncheon.

Chamber annual meeting

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made up of area high-ranking corporate executives, Williams announced the establishment of an entrepreneurial scholarship in Usher's name.

Spencer recounted an incident from his days as a general manager of human resources at U. S. Steel not long after Usher began his tenure as president. "It was a time when steel was losing money and very relationship-driven," he recalled. Spencer had just placed a top-performing salesman (who just happened to be Black) in a rural area of Georgia. Other upper management colleagues balked and tried to "filibuster" Spencer's selection. The dispute eventually ended up in the new president's lap. Usher went against the prevailing wisdom and supported Spencer.

Spencer proudly paraphrased Usher's rebuttal: "If they don't want to do business with a top-

performer who happens to be Black, then we don't want to do business with them."



PHOTOS PROVIDED BY AACC

INSIDER INFORMATION—From left: Pitt vice chancellor Robert Hill processes shared information from Rev. Glenn G. Grayson of Wesley Center AME Zion Church, who gave the luncheon invocation.



OLD FRIENDS AND FORMER COLLEAGUES—Thomas J. Usher and Greg Spencer used to work together at U.S. Steel.



MUSICIAN AS ENTREPRENEUR—Retiring PSO member Patricia Prattis Jennings was honored for her 40-year tenure and service to the greater Pittsburgh community.