

PHOTO COURTESY
10/6-12/07

Meakem issues unexpected challenge at Chamber luncheon

by C. Denise Johnson
Courier Staff writer

Most in attendance at the African American Chamber of Commerce annual meeting luncheon expected to hear a perspective on technology matters from guest speaker Glen R. Meakem of Meakem Becker Venture Capital, who harnessed technology to build his future and establish a viable enterprise.

As a successful entrepreneur who made his fortune as a co-founder of FreeMarkets, an online auction enterprise that valued at \$10 billion in trading on the first day the firm went public, Meakem sold his then 9-year-old company in 1999 for nearly \$500 million to Ariba in 2004.

So when Meakem took an unexpected turn and swerved right into the thorny and touchy issue of Black on Black crime and its collateral damage—an escalating homicide rate that often times finds Black men on both ends of the gun—he definitely captured the attention of the audience of business leaders and entrepreneurs that filled the grand ballroom of the Omni William Penn in downtown last week.

Citing public policy as a deterrent to business growth and job creation, which result in an increased

sense of despair and desperation among young Black males, Meakem made his point clear.

"These are our children in the streets," said Meakem as he challenged the assembly to contribute to a solution. "This blood in the streets is the ultimate evidence that the economic policies of the state of Pennsylvania are not working."

Meakem referenced the decline of population in the past decade as well as statistics released earlier

this year from the Washington, D.C.-based Violence Policy Center that named Pennsylvania as the state leading the nation in Black homicide victims.

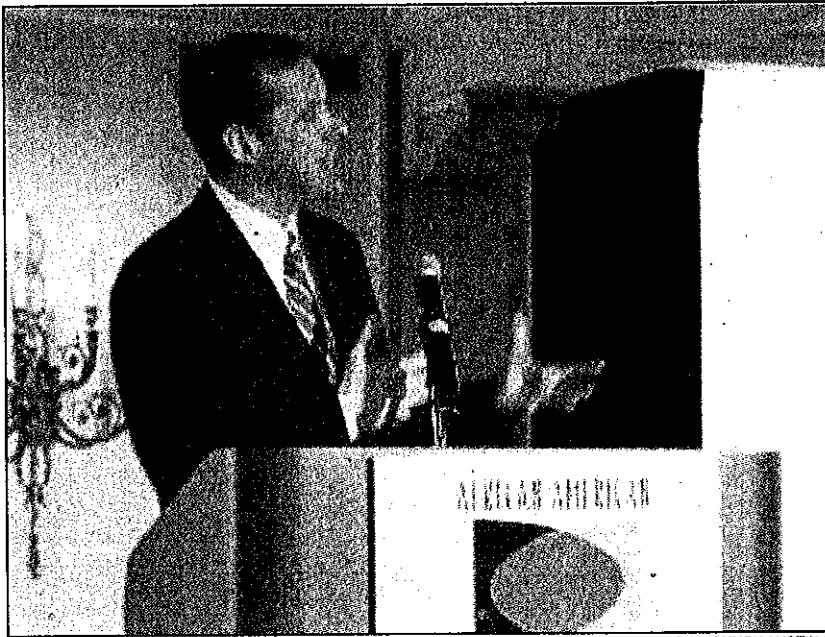
Naming specific policies such as tax break incentives and myopic kowtowing to union demands, particularly the right to strike, Meakem asked if each policy was "helping or is it hurting."

Meakem's remarks also underscored the importance of personal responsibility to reverse the statistics.

New chamber board members were introduced during the gathering: Ann Rucker of Rucker & Associates and Howard Graves of Graves Architects, Inc.; Loretta Goodwin of LLG & Associates just concluded her board term.

The chamber made a special presentation to Dr. Edward Barksdale, a pediatric surgeon who is leaving Children's Hospital after 13 years to accept a position with Rainbow Babies and Children's Hospital in Cleveland, in appreciation for his service to the community.

The eighth annual meeting luncheon was also an occasion to acknowledge the progress made in the increase of business referrals (6,900) as well as the distribution of over 5,000 bids for proposals. The African American Chamber of Commerce of Western Pennsylvania, founded in 1994, enjoys a membership of nearly 500.



PHOTOS BY CHUCK AUSTIN 2

GUEST SPEAKER—Glen R. Meakem cited public policy as a deterrent to business growth and job creation during his speech at the African American Chamber of Commerce annual meeting luncheon.



PRESENTATION—Dr. Edward Barksdale accepts the special presentation from the Chamber as Doris Carson Williams applauds.