

A decade of success

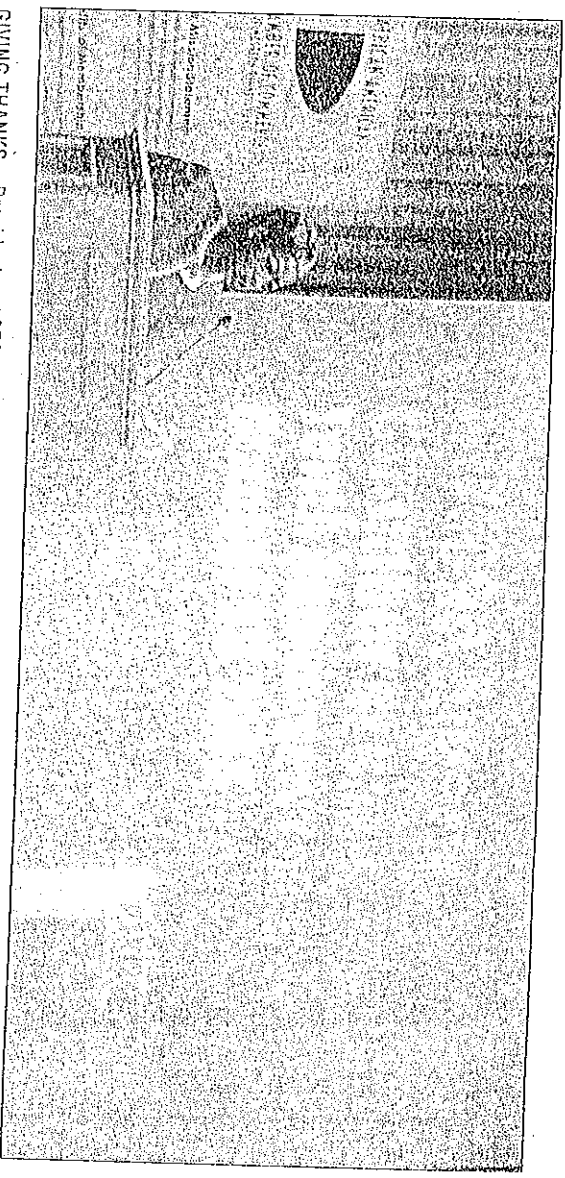
By -- Denise Johnson
Courier Staff Writer

A little more than 10 years ago Doris Carson Williams, then director of business Enterprises at the Carnegie Museums, met Robert O. Agbede for lunch. It just so happened that around that time Agbede and a group of like-minded entrepreneurs were ready to take their four year-old non-profit trade association to the next level.

Agbede, president and CEO of Chester Engineers, a charter member and first chair of the association, saw its potential executive director -- an individual who was to be the quest of a pending national search -- during the lunch. Of course we now know that Agbede, with his keen eye for talent, was correct in his initial calculation.

Ten years later the African American Chamber of Commerce of Western Pennsylvania is positioned as the "go-to" organization to learn about and connect to the regional array of Black enterprise.

Charter members of the chamber, who include Agbede, Clarence Curry and Howard Graves, saw the need to position the entity in parity with like organizations. In addition to having a traditional 501(c)(3) status, it also has a 501(c)(6), which, for larger corporations such as US Steel, PNC and the University of Pittsburgh, for example, not only provides them with an investment incentive, but also provides a tax deduction for its involve-



GIVING THANKS—President and CEO Doris Carson Williams at the podium in Frick Auditorium, thanks corporate sponsors for their support over the past decade. Approximately 128 members and corporate sponsors attended the celebration.

African American Chamber Celebrates 10th anniversary



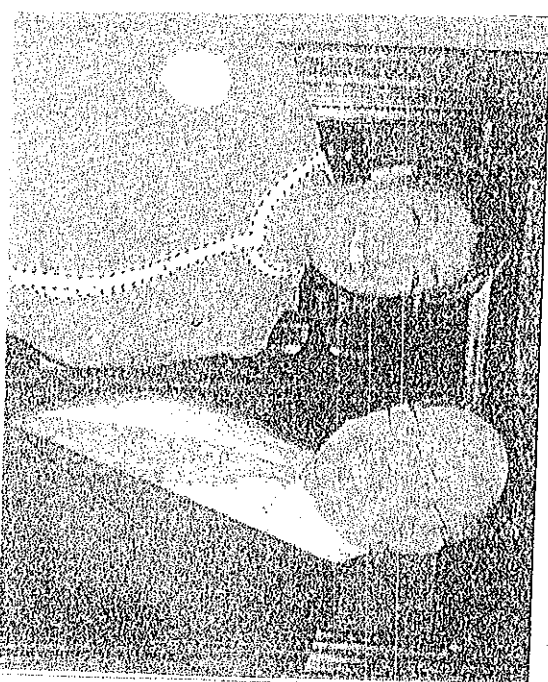
THREE BOARD CHAIRMEN—From left: Gregory Spencer, Robert Agbede and Sam Stephenson. Greg Spencer was chairman from 2003-2005, Robert Agbede was chairman from 1998-2003, and Sam Stephenson became chairman in 2005.

ment with the chamber. In addition to hiring an executive director and establishing an office in the old Alcoa building (now known as the Regional Enterprise Tower), the chamber retained one of the best legal minds in the region—Glenn Malone of Reed Smith.

Now, the AACOC was really on its way.

"The chamber is about building effective partnerships in corporate, government and public communities," said Doris Carson Williams, who now serves as the chamber's president and CEO. "It is very rewarding to take every skill you ever learned and use it for the benefit of your peers and

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Chamber celebrates decade of success

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constituents)."

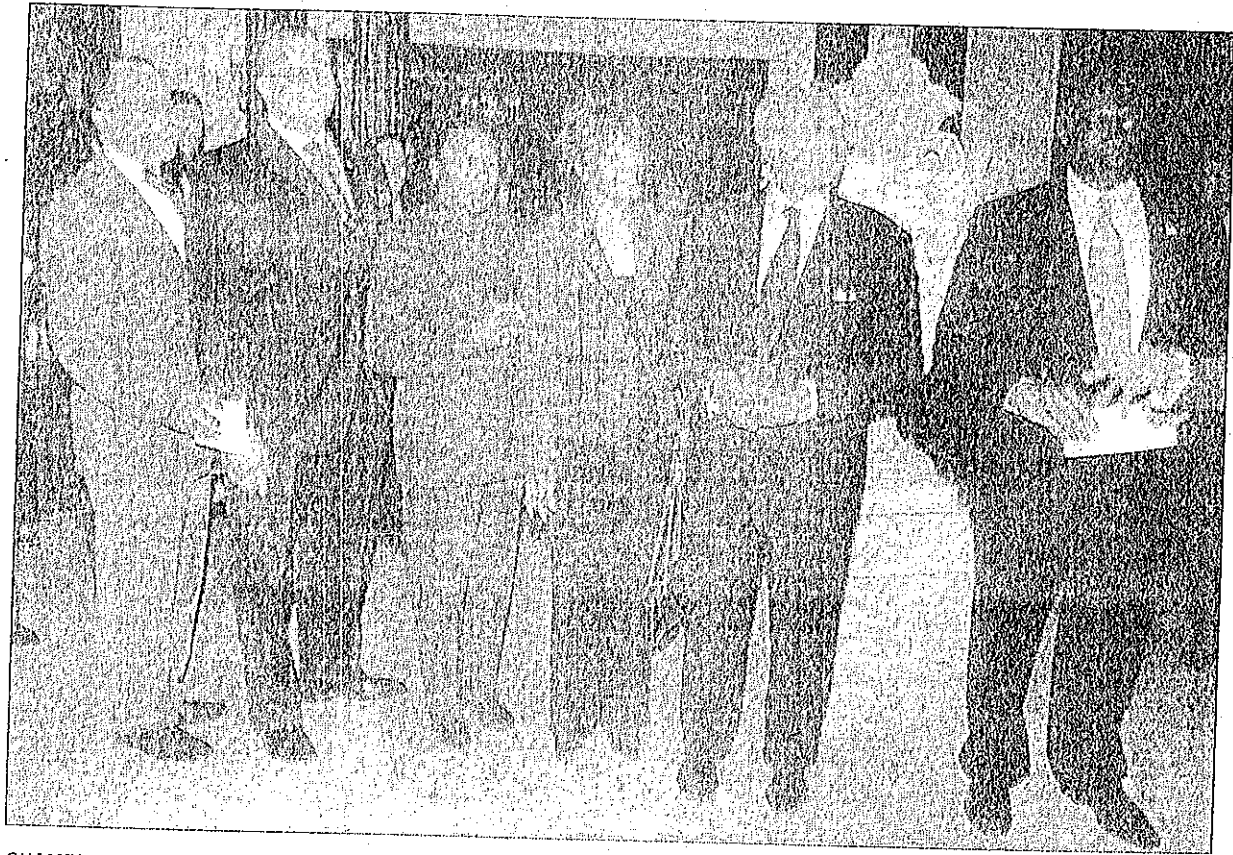
Effective relationships and collaboratives were instrumental in the chamber's growth in prominence as well as membership, said Williams. Key allies and supporters include Tom Usher of US Steel and Richard Simmons of Allegheny Teledyne, both of whom encouraged corporate partnership. The chamber got its message out, with a PSA produced by WPXI-TV featuring the esteemed and revered Robert Lavelle of Dwelling House Savings and Loan and Lavelle Realty. The New Pittsburgh Courier also provided plenty of coverage on a regular basis.

Beneficial would be an understatement—some the perks for the 500-plus members of the chamber include access to some of the most influential powerbrokers and decision-makers in the region during monthly Power-Breakfasts; continuing education and updates on leading trends via the chamber's Business Institute; notification of bids and requests for proposals; technical assistance with a variety of issues including start-ups, training

nership with the Department of Energy's National Energy Technology Laboratory and the DOE Office of Economic Impact and Diversity to design and create a program that promotes access to energy commodity trading for women- and minority-owned businesses.

Although the country has reached the historic milestone of electing its first Black president,

Asheville still has the



CHAMBER FOUNDATION MEMBERS—From left: Glenn Mahone, general counsel; Gregory Spencer; Cheryl Allen; James Diggs and Chairman Sam Stephenson. Not shown, Bill Strickland.