

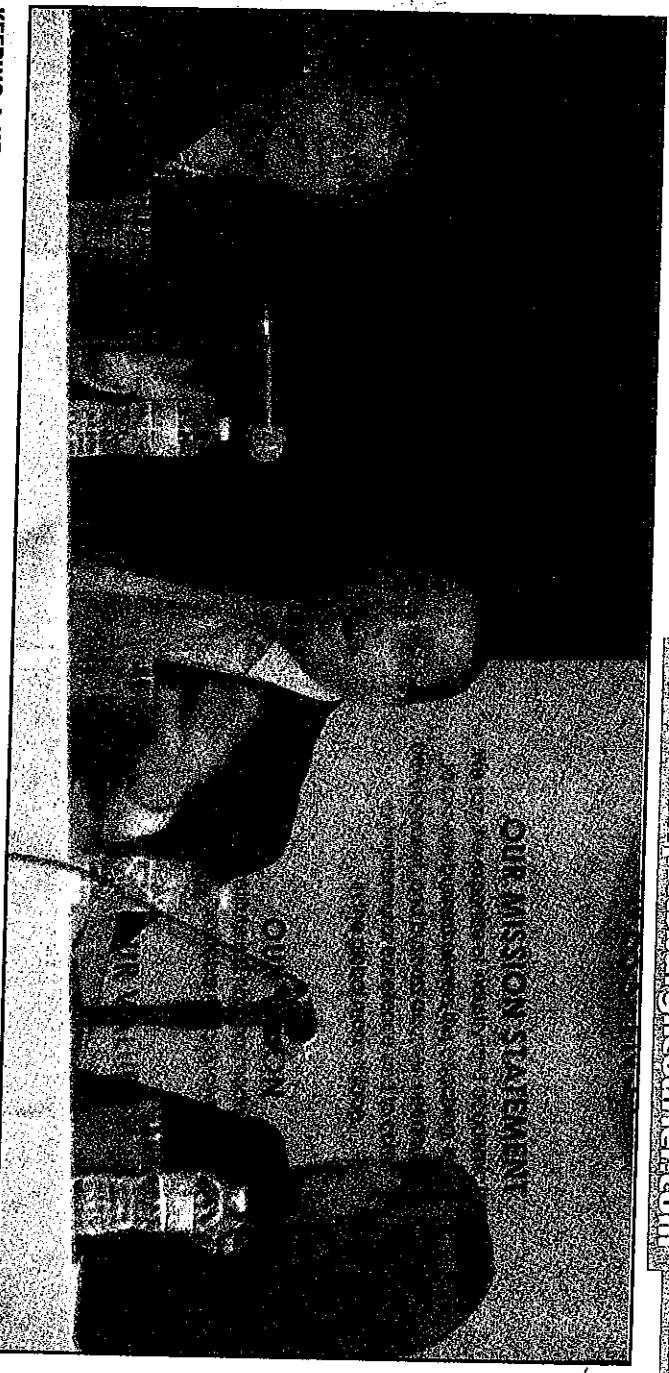


Inside Conditions
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New Pittsburgh Courier BUSINESS

JUNE 8-14, 2011

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KEEPING A HEALTHY BUSINESS—From the first Diabetes Workshop, the panelists from left: Dr. Rhonda Johnson, Dr. Calvin Johnson and Terri Seidman. (Photo by J.L. Martello).

African American Chamber features diabetes workshop series

by Christian Morrow

Courier Staff Writer

As a full-service organization, the African American Chamber of Commerce offers its members a variety of extras aimed at improving small business productivity and profitability.

In addition to its business institute, PowerBreakfast meetings, networking opportunities, and even payroll services, the Chamber also offers its members health, life, disability, dental, and discount automobile insurance.

"We're trying to deal with the totality of companies' needs," said President and CEO Doris Carson Williams. "They need access to healthcare and a healthy workforce. Healthy employees miss fewer days and are more productive. So this is one of the value-adds that we provide to help our small and minority-owned businesses improve their bottom lines."

Several members involved in medical and health professions, Williams decided to take advantage of their expertise by holding a series of seminars addressing health issues, primarily those affecting the African-American community. That decision has since de-

veloped a life of its own.

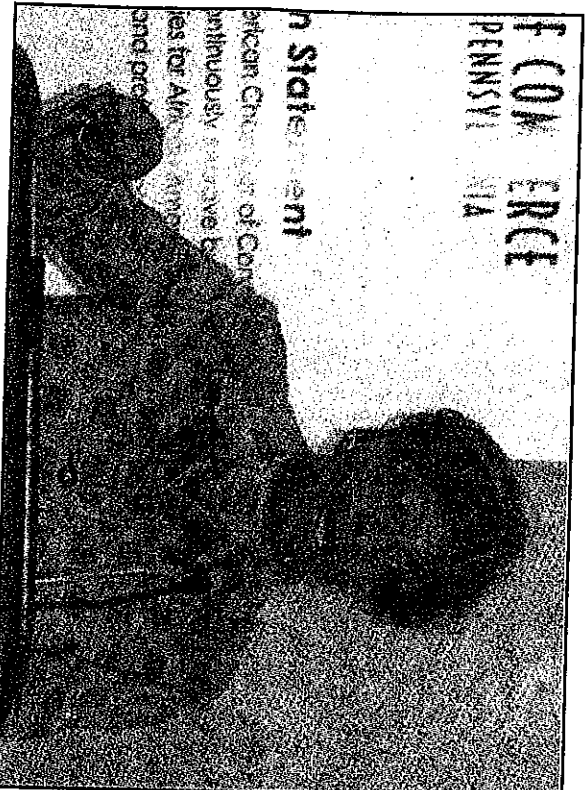
"We found we hadn't been doing a lot with our medical members," she said. "So, in 2009 we had Dr. Joseph Betancourt from Boston speak on health disparities. In the audience was Dr. Lakshmanan Krishnamurti from UPMC Children's hospital, and he then did a presentation on sickle cell disease and treatment. That was so well received, we just kept going. Now we are doing this big series on diabetes."

In order to tailor presentations to the needs of its membership, the chamber took advantage of the expertise of another member, Numeretics, to conduct interviews and exit surveys. Those survey results led to the diabetes series the chamber is now conducting.

"But we also knew from the data that a single session would not do," Williams said. "Western Pennsylvania has the highest incidence of Type II (late onset) diabetes

among African-Americans in the country. So we set up a committee to put this together. And because it's so important, all of these sessions are open to the public—business owners, nonprofits, churches and individuals."

The committee included former State Secretary of Health Dr. Calvin Johnson, Dr. Rhonda Johnson from Highmark, Terri Seidman of the American Diabetes Foundation, Dr. Jeanette South-Paul from the University of Pittsburgh, Otis Story, fellow at the College of Healthcare Executives, and Dr. Angela Ford from the Center for Minority Health. The result was an eight-part series of workshops to



DORIS CARSON WILLIAMS

SEE DIABETES C2

Diabetes workshop series

CONTINUED FROM C1

be held quarterly over two years.

The first session, held at Manchester Bidwell Corp. March 10, provided a general overview of the disease. The next session, to be held at 3 p.m. June 29 at Allegheny General Hospital's Magovern Conference Center, will feature presentations by Dr. Vanessa Richardson, an endocrinologist from AGH and by Dr. Lenore Coleman, author of "Healing our Village: A Self Guide to Diabetes Control."

An hour prior to the workshop, free confidential testing will be offered to all who attend. Those interested

must register ahead of time with the phlebotomist by calling 412-330-2535.

Media sponsor WQED is digitally recording each workshop and will provide discs to all attendees. The next session in September will focus on diet and exercise, and future workshops are planned with foot doctors and eye doctors to discuss complications arising from diabetes and treatments.

"If people are healthy, they'll go to work on time and be more attentive," Williams said. "It's another way to help strengthen our businesses and our region."

(Send comments to anorov@newpittsburghcourier.com.)