

Museum director keynotes Chamber luncheon

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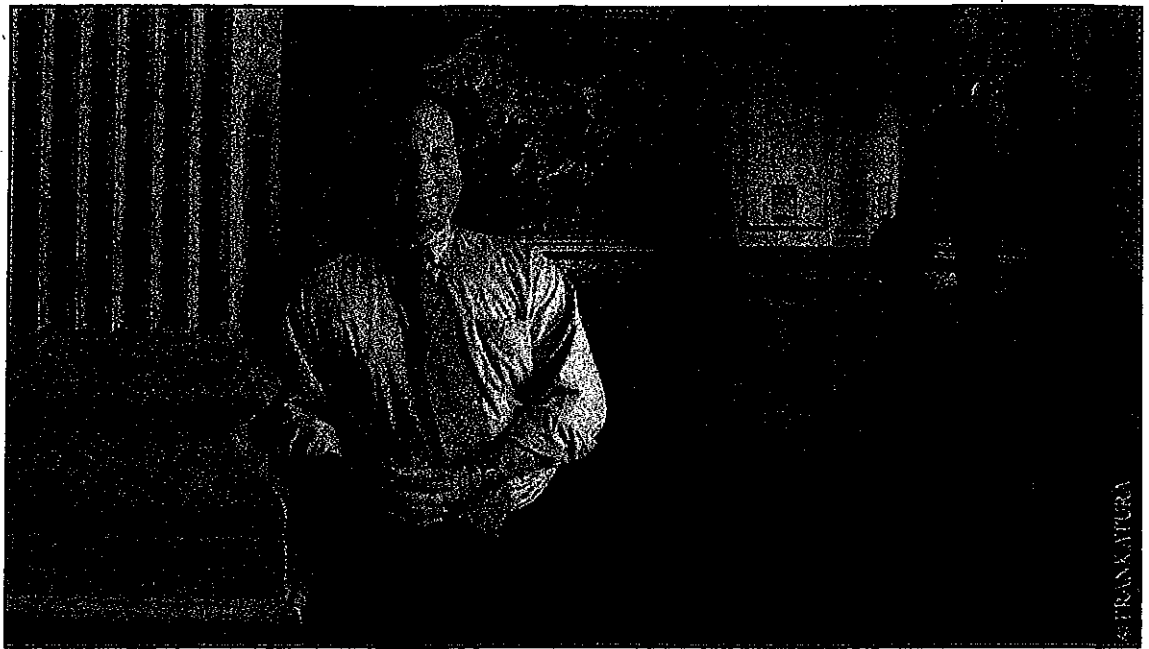
African American Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Doris Carson Williams welcomed members and partners to its annual business luncheon at the Westin William Penn by thanking them for an exciting year filled with new connections and initiatives that have helped increase membership and sponsorship.

"Our theme—The Next Connections, recognizes our changing membership, and our direction to connect on broadening services to the larger business community," Williams said.

"One example is our highly successful and well-attended series of diabetes workshops with West Penn Allegheny Health Systems. They included young and old, African-Americans and others whom we might not have met through the course of normal business.

"The result has been increased sponsorship for new initiatives, new members and business. We also held workshops on utilizing social media and connecting with the Rivers Casino, and our Power Breakfasts included the Marcellus Shale Coalition and its members like EQT, which have linked members to the energy field. So we are working to make that next connection."

One connection Williams made was with the new President of the Carnegie Museums of Pittsburgh John Wetenhall, who served as the luncheon's keynote speaker. In her introduction, she noted he in addition to his doctoral de-



MOVING FORWARD—John Wetenhall, president of the Carnegie Museums of Pittsburgh, addresses building new audiences and partnerships and aligning the museums' missions during his keynote address at the African American Chamber of Commerce annual business luncheon.

grees in fine arts, has a black belt in marshal arts, and as the former director of the John and Mabel Ringling Museum of Art in Sarasota, Fla., "knows how to juggle."

Wetenhall's presentation was amusing and direct, noting—with a slide of a stick figure regarding a painting—that museums have one mission: to engage the public with an object. His job is to increase that engagement. Two recent exhibits are succeeding at doing just that.

"The Teenie Harris exhibit has increased attendance at the Museum of Art by 30 percent, and also garnered a half-page article in last week's Wall Street Journal," he said. "The Comic Art of Alex Ross exhibit at the Warhol Museum has attendance up there by 20 percent."

The costs of putting on such exhibitions, maintaining and augmenting collections, running research projects on four conti-

nents and running educational programs at all four Museums—the Carnegie Museum of Art, Carnegie Museum of Natural History, the Andy Warhol Museum and the Carnegie Science Center, has increased substantially he noted, as federal, state and foundation financial support has been cut.

Wetenhall particularly thanked the Regional Asset District board for its increased allocation to the museums, both for operating expenses and for capital improvements. He also said the museums strategic plan involves coordination and aligning the missions of the four museums to reduce costs.

This he said can be seen in a focus on energy and the environment which includes exhibits on geology and minerals at the Natural History Museum, the science of ecology at the Science Center and even a "Fossil Fuels" exhibit at the Art Museum.

In addition to being a draw for national audiences, Wetenhall is working to attract more regional visitors, and to do more focused programming. It will allow them to continue offering art and education to some who otherwise would not receive them—like the 40,000 low-income visitors who will have attended the museums free of charge this year.

"We serve about 330,000 school kids a year, and one of our science fairs included local businesses to show kids the kinds of opportunities and jobs that careers in science can lead to," he said, then pulling a letter from his jacket. "I'll leave you with this. We got this letter from a teacher in McKeesport thanking us for putting on our science and technology days, and for turning one of her students, John, from a 'C' student to an 'A' student."

(Send comments to cmorrow@newpittsburghcourier.com.)

New Pgh Courier

12/7-13/11