

# Fitzgerald touts partnerships at Chamber breakfast

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By Christian Morrow



**REPEAT PERFORMANCE**—County Executive Rich Fitzgerald poses with Grace Robinson of [State Farm Insurance](#) and her daughter Danielle after his third season-opening PowerBreakfast speech. ([Photo](#) by Shawn Hicks, African American Chamber of Commerce)

[Allegheny County](#) Executive Rich Fitzgerald said much of the region's success has been due to various entities in a variety of sectors working cooperatively and forging partnerships, and he plans to forge new ones going forward to meet the challenge of managing the region's growth.

Fitzgerald told the audience at the African American Chamber of Commerce's first PowerBreakfast for 2015 that he expects some of those new partnerships will be forged with the new administration in Harrisburg—even though Governor-elect Tom Wolf “stole” Dennis Davin from the county to head up the Department of Community and Economic Development.

“In the three years I’ve been county executive, it’s been a wonderful job. And the most is bringing new people into government like Austin Davis,” he said. “Of the 38 people I’ve brought in, 25 are either African-Americans or women. They join mainstays like Marc Cherna. I’m excited about the [future](#).”

One statistic Fitzgerald noted that fuels his optimism comes from United Van Lines, which reported that while 57 percent of its Pennsylvania business involved moving people to other states, in [Allegheny County](#), 50 percent of the business was moving people in from other states.

“We’re growing in IT, in finance, and in energy. The opportunities are tremendous,” he said. “We have young people moving into neighborhoods that 10 years ago we thought no one would move into; Garfield, Lawrenceville, East Liberty. There are [apartments](#) in East Liberty going for \$2,500 a month. Ten Years ago, you probably could have bought a house there for \$2,500.”

Fitzgerald also said the county still has low unemployment over all and will be seeing more opportunities when Alcosan begins its \$3 billion rainwater management upgrade.

He did note, however, that there are still 52,000 unfilled jobs in the region, some which pay well. But, he said, Quentin Bullock, the president at Community College of Allegheny County, is putting in place the educational and [technical training programs](#) needed to help people fill those positions.

During a brief question-and-answer session, Grace Robinson from [State Farm insurance](#) asked what he could do to streamline the bureaucracy that bounces people looking to do business with the city and county between multiple offices that don't seem to be on the same page.

"We're already doing some of that with data (storage) and I'm looking to do it with zoning, planning, contracting and MBE," he said. "We want to make it easier to do business with the county, contracting and MBE," he said. "We want to make it easier to do business with the county."

And in response to business owner Greg Spenser, Fitzgerald said he would work to lower the disparities documented in a recent University of Pittsburgh report that Blacks face in terms of education, employment and wealth building.

"The wealth gap is way out of kilter," he said. "I still want to see some newer numbers on that to see if there's a trend, but I'm committed to shrinking that disparity."

Chamber President and CEO Doris Carson Williams thanked Fitzgerald for his, now, annual informal state of the county address, noting he and Pittsburgh Mayor Bill Peduto have a great partnership and are the city's dynamic duo.

She also welcomed new members and a new President's Roundtable sponsor Consol Energy, which will be holding a workshop with chamber members on how to do business with Consol.

Upcoming events also include a communications workshop with Robert Hill, a members' mixer on Jan. 21 and a members' orientation on Jan. 28. The PowerBreakfast speaker for February will be Port Authority Executive Director Ellen McClain. Mayor Bill Peduto is scheduled for March.