

# Key talks development, inclusion at Chamber PowerBreakfast

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By Christian Morrow



**VISIBILITY MATTERS**—Keith B. Key urges Black business owners to rock the boat and get out and about if they want minority inclusion to include them instead of some other more visible firm. (Photo by J.L. Martello.)

When introducing Keith B. Key to the African American Chamber of Commerce PowerBreakfast audience, President and CEO Doris Carson Williams called it “a feel-good moment.”

“He has had such good fortune in doing things the right way,” she said. “He achieved an astounding 50 percent minority participation on (the redevelopment of) Garfield Heights and 43 percent on Skyline Terrace which used to be Addison Terrace. And three days ago, city council gave him the key to the city.”

Key who is also currently developing the first phase of the Larimer redevelopment and building mixed-income housing in Homewood, thanked the chamber saying the organization makes his job a lot easier.

Though his KBK Enterprises, which includes a development firm, a construction company, a property management company and a foundation, is based in Columbus, Ohio, Key grew up in the Hill District and Garfield. So coming back here, he said, is special.

“When I won the Garfield bid it was just another deal, until I went to a community meeting and it got emotional when a man stood up and said they should support me because the \$100 million deal was the largest ever issued in Pittsburgh to a Black developer—and he used to be my neighbor,” said Key.



**WELCOMING INCLUSION**—African American Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Doris Carson Williams welcomes PowerBreakfast speaker developer Keith B. Key. (Photos by J.L. Martello.)

“And I looked, and it was Phil Petite. I hadn’t seen him in 20 years. Ever since then, it’s been more about helping minority firms get a chance to participate.”

Key said as a developer he’s in a position where he doesn’t just look for people, but makes decisions.

“We just don’t hope it happens,” he said. “We make it happen. Sometimes that means sticking with people who fail. But we do it all down the line from general contractor to contractor to subcontractor to employee.”

Now, however, the problem for Black businesses is different. Pittsburgh, he said, is at the stage where it’s not a question of finding minority businesses.

“The problem is—will it be you,” he said. “There’s a sense that you can do okay if you don’t rock the boat. But it’s the people that rocked the boat who allowed us in.”

Key urged the audience to get vocal about their companies, their capabilities and their talents.

“I have more people calling me than I need to call,” he said “I have 350 people in my database and maybe 20 of them are plumbers. But they aren’t here—he is (indicating new chamber member Alex Beasley). And he’s talking to my team over at the table. And you have to be at the table to play in the game.”

“We’re in a good place now,” he continued. “But you need to go to fundraisers, receptions, stay involved. You have to get out there—because I am.”