

Mayor, Highmark CEO highlight African American Chamber luncheon

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By Christian Morrow



HEARTY THANKS—Chamber President and CEO Doris Carson Williams and Chair Sam Stephenson give a chamber “key” to Annual Luncheon speaker Highmark President and CEO David Holmberg. (Photos by J.L. Martello)

Typically, the politicians attending the African American Chamber of Commerce Annual Meeting and Luncheon make brief remarks saluting the chamber’s great work advancing Black business opportunities. And true to form, Allegheny County Executive Rich Fitzgerald did so this year, praising the chamber and its President and CEO Doris Carson Williams for her work.

Pittsburgh Mayor Bill Peduto didn’t do that this time. He had news to share.

“I have to go off-script, here. I just now came from a meeting where we announced a settlement with the ACLU over a lawsuit about discrimination in police hiring,” he said. “Imagine being told you couldn’t be hired because you smoked pot in high school, but a White officer who’d done it more recently is hired, or being rejected for moving violations when a White officer with worse offenses is hired. That went on, but with this agreement, we are committed to seeing it does not continue. I thought that would be of interest.”



TIMELY TIDINGS—Mayor Bill Peduto forgoes his usual remarks to announce the city has settled an ACLU lawsuit and will scrap police hiring practices that have discriminated against Blacks.

Following the applause, Williams continued her welcoming remarks, thanking Peduto, Fitzgerald and other government officials in attendance at the Omni William Penn Hotel, as well

as the chambers members, partners and sponsors that made it a banner year. In particular she singled out developer Keith B. Key.

“Keith’s KBK Enterprises is our first Black-owned Presidential Roundtable-level member,” she said. “He not only actively supports the chamber but he also wrote all of those he does business with locally and urged them to join as well.”

As the luncheon commenced, large video screens showed photos from chamber workshops, mixers, candidate forums and foreign trips, as well as new membership totals, event sponsors and incoming and outgoing board officers.

Williams then introduced this year’s keynote speaker, Highmark President and CEO David Holmberg. He noted he’d been the healthcare giant’s president for a year, and joked that he wanted to come to the chamber sooner, but “Doris wanted to see if I’d stick.”

I’m blessed to be in a position where the people who came before me made the choice to save 17,000 jobs,” he said. “And we’re planning on making \$600 million in investments in Erie, Forbes, West Penn and Allegheny General Hospital, so we can be more flexible and capable where you are, so we can treat more people in their communities.”

He added that investment means job opportunities, and he like it to mean opportunities for the people in the audience.

“We’re talking tech, business systems, supplies,” he said. “There’s ways you can be part of it. And there’s a table of people right there who will be happy to talk to you about that.”

Holmberg said he and Highmark are committed to doing right by the community, to building a healthy community that doesn’t need to come to a massive central hospital for every little thing—but that can when the need arises.

“And in a health community quality education and jobs are available,” he said. “We need to find out how we can partner with communities on those investments, including affordable housing and business in the community.”

As for the company’s battle with UPMC, Holmberg joked that he never talks about that before 3:30 in the afternoon.

“Our objective here is to offer choice, not to bow to people who don’t like us,” he said.