

Programs geared to help small businesses prosper

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By Diane I. Daniels



COMMUNITY PARTNERS—Doris Carson Williams, President and CEO of the African American Chamber of Commerce of Western Pennsylvania and Valarie Cofield, President and CEO of the Eastern Minority Supplier Diversity Council share a moment with Lance Hyde, EQTs' Supplier Diversity Manager. (Photos by Diane I. Daniels)

Activities have continuously been occurring to prepare prime and sub-prime businesses for procurement opportunities throughout the region. Organizations often conduct workshops, seminars and trade fairs while large corporations and businesses frequently sponsor prime contractors and matchmaking events.

August 12 and 13 of this week the Fourth Annual Supplier Diversity Matchmaking Event, a national initiative took place in Canonsburg. Registered businesses received free Growth Training offered by the Shell Oil Company. Participating sponsors and their prime suppliers met with qualified suppliers who have the capacity and capability to work in the Marcellus region of Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Ohio, Eagle Ford, the Permian Basin, the Gulf Coast, North Dakota and Colorado. The theme of this weeks' supplier diversity event is Building Capacity, Making Connections.

Construction and maintenance services, cranes, drilling and construction, drilling materials, electronics, fencing, fuel, machinery and equipment, safety services and well services equipment are a few of the many types of goods and services major companies and corporations like the EQT Corporation are seeking.



FULL OF ADVICE—Panelists during a Prime Contractor’s Meeting share their opinion with top suppliers. Suresh Ramanathan of KORYAK Consulting, Bony Dawood of Dawood Engineering, Sean Sparks and Shannon Malisani of Tetra Tech.

During a recent prime contractors meeting, Lance Hyde, EQTs’ Supplier Diversity Manager outlined ways for their top level suppliers to expand their reach to tier two level suppliers. He said EQT strives to award procurement contracts locally whenever possible.

“EQT understands the socio-economic value of buying local to enhance indigenous economies,” he said. Their footprint encompasses Pennsylvania, Ohio, West Virginia, Virginia and Kentucky and most recently expanded into Texas.

More than 30 of their top suppliers were on hand during a lunch where the EQT tier 2 reporting process was reviewed the introduction of two of EQTs community partners was made and the group heard a panel discussion from their peers. The lunch was catered by Carmi Family Restaurant located on the North Side.

Hyde said information from all levels is valuable to their suppliers. “Meeting our partners provided them access to available resources and demonstrated the types of support base tier 2 businesses have access to and the panel discussion let them hear from businesses like them that are already providing business opportunities to smaller companies.” He said such Prime Contractors meetings are held in hopes that their top suppliers understand the value in spending money with and providing opportunities for minority owned firms.

The EQT community partner representatives on hand outlining their benefits and resources were Doris Carson Williams, president and CEO of the African American Chamber of Commerce of Western Pennsylvania and Valarie Cofield, president and CEO of the Eastern Minority Supplier Diversity Council.

Known for its capability of providing access, building networks and creating opportunities, Williams defined the African American Chamber’s mission as “to continuously improve business and professional opportunities for African American business owners and professionals throughout the region.” Two of their staple programs are the monthly PowerBreakfast Meetings and the Business Institute. During the monthly breakfast a chief executive officer outlines how to do business with their company or organization.

The Business Institute is designed to assist its members and other minorities to expand their business opportunities. Williams labels it as a key tool in assisting its members in growing,

evolving and advancing into complex territories. She said it is guided by the values of entrepreneurial excellence, empowerment and self-sufficiency, life-long learning, innovative thinking, and meaningful linkages and partnerships.” Contact information for the African American Chamber is www.aaccwp.com or 412-392-0610.

With an estimated 500 certified members on a national level, and locally covering the areas of Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware, Cofield said the Council is positioned to meet the challenges of an ever changing marketplace. The mission of EMSDC, an affiliate of the National Minority Supplier Development Council is to advance business opportunities by certifying and connecting minority business enterprises to corporate members who wish to purchase their products, services and solutions. She outlined their core values that form the foundation for delivery of services to certified minority business enterprises and corporate members as certifying, developing, connecting and advocating as their four pillars. Contact information for the Council is www.emsdc.org or 412-391- 4423.

Do your homework, stay informed, network and find a champion within the corporation you are interested in doing business with is some of the advice provided during the panel discussion. Panelists included Bony Dawood; president of Dawood Engineering, Suresh Ramanathan the owner of KORYAK Consulting, Sean Sparks an ecologist/biologist and Shannon Malisani the procurement manager of Tetra Tech.

A member of the African American Chamber and a certified business of the EMSDC, Ramanathan stressed that business is all about relationships, being prepared and performing at your best level.

Both Ramanathan and Dawood agree that participating in business organizations and their events helps businesses no matter what stage they are in. “Participating in matchmaker programs has been beneficial to me,” said Dawood. “It’s a great opportunity to get in front of the right people and they help you get past the gate keepers.”

Representing Tetra Tech, the largest business on the panel with more than 300 offices worldwide, Sparks and Malisani suggests that business owners stay informed and know what opportunities are available. “Get registered with Councils and Chambers and certified as minority, women and or veteran businesses,” said Malisani. Sparks pointed out that corporations share information among their selves and that it is important to be in company data bases.

Since 2012, Hyde has been working with EQT. He educates internal stakeholders on Supplier Diversity and works externally to identify and foster the development of diverse owned business enterprises. His goal and desire is to assist small business owners and to contribute to their job growth. By continuously sponsoring prime contractors meetings and supplier diversity matchmaking events he says he hopes other major companies start conducting similar programs that provide education and mentorship assistance to businesses in a way that makes a difference and gets results.