

# Black entrepreneurs sparse at annual business conference

Catisha Marsh  
Sentinel-Voice

Thousands of executives, salespeople, government officials and experts convened at the Thomas and Mack Center earlier this month for the annual Preview '99 business conference.

Noticeably absent from the annual forum which is used to tout Las Vegas' economic growth and forecast the latest business trends in entertainment, gaming and hospitality, finance, real estate and retail were black entrepreneurs.

Recent surveys estimate there are 600 black-owned businesses in Las Vegas. Less than one percent attended Preview, which is jointly presented by the Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce and the Nevada Development Authority.

"We find out about things after the fact," said Debbie Conway, director of the Clark County Small Business Development Division and a Preview participant. "Once we're informed, we should be showing up and taking advantage of all the

opportunities."

"Preview? I didn't even know about it," said Kamau Bakari, owner of Kemet Electric, an independent black-owned subcontracting company.

Conway attributed the problem to a limited emphasis on corporate outreach toward minorities, apathy on the part of minority business owners and the lack of a centralized place for African-American businesspeople to access the latest news and information.

Trish Williamson, public relations coordinator at the Chamber of Commerce, said the Chamber welcomes diversity at its events and in its membership, citing the ads it ran on Spanish radio.

"We need to reach out more I would guess," she said. "I hope that Blacks or any groups don't think they're not welcome. Everybody is very welcome."

Bob Bailey, president and CEO of New Ventures, Inc., and a 25-year Chamber veteran, would have attended Preview '99 had he been in town.

"Success doesn't come



DIANA AIRD

easy to small businesses in this town," he continued. "The opportunity to rub shoulders with major players here and in the country shouldn't be taken lightly."

Bailey said many black business owners don't invest enough time into preparing for success or into filling out paperwork to get loans, contracts and make bids.

"It's not all 'the system,'" he said. "Oftentimes, we don't do what it takes to get those loans and contracts and we don't locate our businesses in areas that banks would consider conducive to business."

Diana Aird, president of Aird and Associates and editor of the Official Ethnic Destination/Visitors Guide said that the two primary reasons that black businesses don't thrive are that they cannot get the financing they need and that they are often "robbed out of business."

Her organization is a member of the Chamber of Commerce and she usually makes Preview a regular trip.

"Like the President's State of the Union Address and the Governor's State of the State Address, Preview is the State of Business Address," she said.

"Unfortunately, much of what goes on there is outside the realm of small business owners, especially ethnic small businesses."

Speakers included Pete Nordstrom, co-president of Nordstrom, J. Terrance Lanni, chairman and CEO of MGM Grand, Inc., Michael Klausman, President of CBS Studio Center, Richard Lee, public relations director of First American Title Co. of Nevada, UNLV president Dr. Carol Harter, and UNLV



BOB BAILEY

football coach John Robinson. Some black business owners would have done well to make contacts with the likes of those speakers. But for most, like Kemet Electric, life goes on.

Bakari said business hasn't suffered much from an inability to network with industry heavy hitters.

"I'm overwhelmed and busy. Too busy. I'm turning down jobs," he said, adding that blacks should pool their money, increase its turnover rate within the community and put money in one of the local black credit unions.

Patricia Saulter, owner

and a broker at Patricia's Real Estate and Property Management, is a Chamber member but was unaware that Preview was going on. She would like black business owners to concentrate on boosting advertising.

"We need more advertising dollars," she said. "We need to get more of that money and spend more to expose ourselves."

Conway said she left Preview '99 with information on how companies can profit from the construction of the Strip monorail, the development of Lake Las Vegas, building an MGM casino in Detroit and signing on with Purchase Pro technology.

"There are opportunities available for everyone," she said. "We should see the direction the entire county is going in. It's growing. We need to do the same."

"The opportunities that are taken advantage of will be commensurate with the effort put forth by African-Americans," Bailey said. "The potential is good, though."

## New president laying groundwork for Urban Chamber's rebirth

Catisha Marsh  
Sentinel-Voice

The history of the Urban Chamber of Commerce, once the Nevada Black Chamber of Commerce, is a rocky one. But according to the president-elect Sherman Rutledge and board members better days are ahead.

The new chamber board met recently to map out an operational plan for the new year.

"We're establishing a strong economic network," said Rutledge, general manager of KCEP Power 88.

Plans include creating networking opportunities for members and the community and building an infrastructure in the community.

Rutledge helped resurrect KCEP, a nonprofit station run by the Economic Opportunity Board, by increasing sponsorship, implementing innovative service projects and shoring up the station's fiscal health. He'll be looked to work similar wonders in the chamber.

"Sherman has a good vision and he's definitely the man to carry it out," said Janice Cooper, administrative assistant at the chamber and its only salaried employee.

The Chamber is no stranger to anointed saviors. It closed down in 1995 and

stayed closed until 1997 when Harvey Phelps took over and was heralded as the man to restore the Chamber's viability.

But the former Detroit businessman resigned after little more than two years as president. Before Phelps' reign, the Black Chamber owed \$18,000 in federal grant money and internal strife plagued the organization.

"I wasn't involved at the time," Rutledge said. "I won't be involved in anything messy."

Rutledge will have to vie for members with a half dozen other chambers for members, including the Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce which boasts 5,700 members. The Urban Chamber plans to attract members interested in diversity.

Jerrie Merritt, vice-president of private banking at First Security Bank and treasurer of the chamber, said the group hopes "to strengthen the organization by having better programming, education and empowerment of the business community."

She said the chamber will continue its monthly luncheons held on the fourth Friday of every month. The next luncheon will be this Friday, Jan. 22 from 11:30

am to 1 pm at Russell's Restaurant, 3200 E. Cheyenne.

Sponsored by Nevada Bell, Kevin Patton, Bell regional director and Urban Chamber board member will discuss his company's Community Renrichment Program. There will also be

workshops to educate members on Y2K readiness and on training small business owners how to create business plans, file taxes and apply for loans.

Rutledge said that the immediate goals of the group will be to provide networking events, increase procurement

contracts for businesses and turn them onto e-commerce, buying and selling via e-mail on the Internet. Members will also have access to Purchase Pro, a computer software system that expands procurement opportunities.

Along with these efforts, Rutledge said the Chamber

will work to increase venture capital to start businesses in West Las Vegas.

Chamber members do not have to live in Las Vegas. Memberships range from \$100 to \$2,000. Those interested can call the Urban Chamber of Commerce at 648-6222.

### Law Firm of Smith & Williams

ATTORNEY AT LAW



TIMOTHY C. WILLIAMS

Timothy Williams is a member of the Nevada & Illinois State Bar, practicing primarily in personal injury cases.

COMBINED 27 YEARS OF LEGAL EXPERIENCE

EMPHASIS ON PERSONAL INJURY CASES

- Automobile Accidents
- Motorcycle Accidents
- Slips & Falls
- Wrongful Death
- Dog Bites
- Pedestrian & Other Bodily Injuries
- Medical Malpractice

892-0000

1785 E. Sahara Ave. Ste. 337  
Las Vegas, Nevada

Neither the State Bar of Nevada nor any agency of the State Bar has certified any lawyer identified here as a specialist or expert. Anyone considering a lawyer should independently investigate the lawyer's credentials and ability.