

Gaming

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 of the various programs is outweighed by the benefits. It's not just morally right, it makes sense from a business perspective," Gladney said.

"When you think of the Hispanic buying power, a figure near \$400 billion, and the African-American buying power of \$500 billion, diversity just makes good business sense," he said. "A commitment to diversity from the top management of the company is crucial," said Gladney. "It won't work without it."

Included among the many African-American leaders brought to town by the "Gaming Venues - II" conference was Congressman Benny Thompson D-Miss.

Speaking at the event's banquet on Friday evening, Thompson related the story of Tunica, Mississippi, a town that has been revitalized by gaming. African-American businesses get a significant portion of the gaming business, and Tunica is also home of the nation's only black female casino general manager.

Gaming replaced "King Cotton" as an industry because "a few of us started a dialog," Thompson said. "Understand the ground rules, if the rules aren't fair, change them, but understand them and the terminology," he said. "Create the opportunity for diversity to occur."

Other success stories included Detroit, Michigan, where African-Americans are partners with the MGM.

Detroit has three casinos and each of them has partnered with local blacks. The MGM agreement took place because a group of

black people helped craft an operating agreement for the city and the state gaming board that included local ownership.

"We wanted to make sure the employees would be Detroit minorities and targeted groups," said Joe Davis, a partner in the casino. The agreement also directed that minority vendors and construction contractors would receive the casino's business. Out of 12 proposals under consideration, the MGM proposal was awarded the license because "our proposal gave local ownership a priority," said Davis.

A delegation from Indianapolis also shared success stories.

Their success was based on Indiana state legislation which requires "full minor-



Rep. Bennie Thompson, D-Miss., and Shelley Berkley, D-Nev., were among the high-profile participants in the Urban Chamber of Commerce's second gaming summit. Organizers used the event to gauge the casino industry's commitment to increasing diversity in management and business procurement.

Photos special to Sentinel-Voice



Urban Chamber President Hannah Brown, left, and Lillian McMorris of Fox 5 TV, presents Las Vegas Mayor Oscar Goodman with an achievement award for civil rights.

ity and women's business enterprise participation in the riverboat industry."

Legislators held back

votes on the state's riverboat casinos until the legislation included wording mandating that 10 percent of the casinos' business go to minority vendors.

Jim Beard, a construction and food entrepreneur from Indianapolis, stated that without the legislation, he would not be in the food business. His success is based on the partnership he formed with a

national food distribution company that mentored him in the process of doing business with large corporations. As for his construction business, again, he was mentored in the process.

The three-day conference offered a variety of workshops on topics from diversity to international gaming and the economics of gaming. It was often noted that

although improvements for minorities have been made in the gaming industry, there is still far to go.

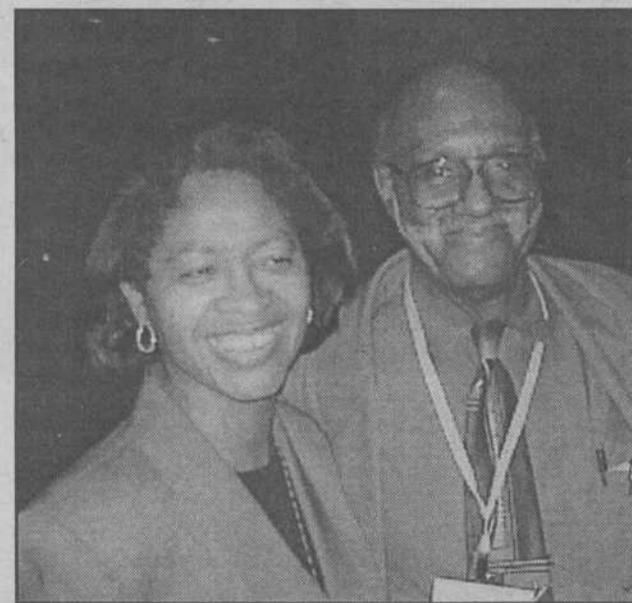
Several speakers, including the Rev. Gary Loster, mayor of Saginaw, Michigan, urged that blacks persevere and not accept a few numbers that represent some improvement in the relationship between gaming corporations and African-Americans.

Thompson echoed that thought. "We won't settle for

anything less than best," he said.

On the other hand, he also cautioned people to not "beat up" on entities like the MGM. "They are not perfect, but at least they have opened the door and get others on board," he said.

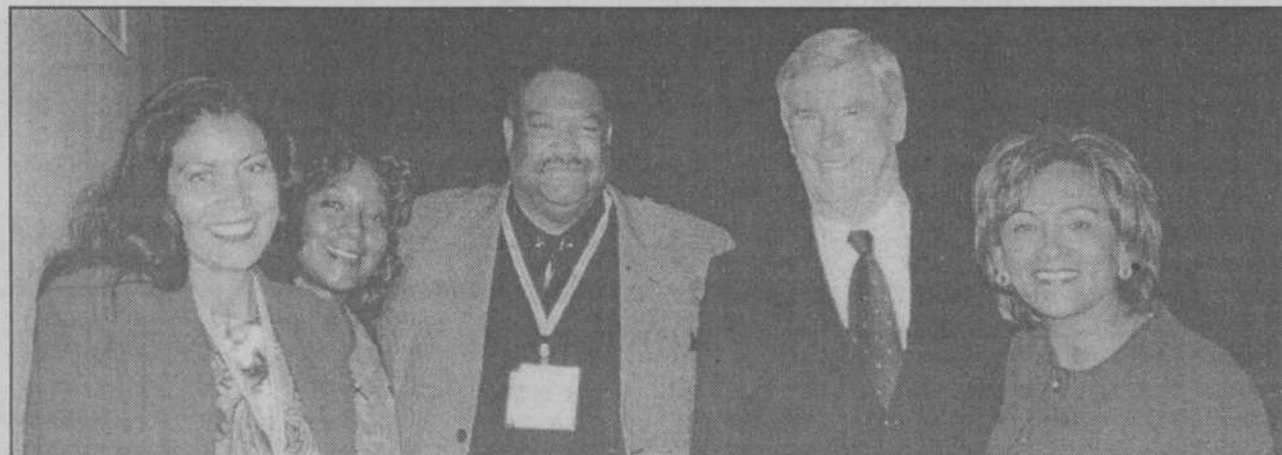
The conference could be summed up by an old quote that popped up repeatedly: "We aren't where we want to be. We aren't where we ought to be, but we aren't we used to be."



Robert Bell, conference co-chair takes a few minutes to talk with participant Yvonne Townsend.



Ernest Stevens, chairman of the National Indian Gaming Association, served as panelist.



After Friday's keynote luncheon, (left to right) Helena Garcia, community activist, Gloria Herbert, publisher Black Meeting & Tourism, Gary L. Loster, President World Conference of Mayors, and Marlene Monteolivo, public relations consultant join Kenny Guinn, Nevada Governor, second from right, in some after thoughts.