

Contractors

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western regions, which includes a large percentage of Hispanic and other ethnic minority owners.

He emphasized that the NAMC represents all of its members but said he believes the organization serves the Black community quite favorably through its training and support programs that provide a gateway to the industry for upstart firms, young people and women who want to enter one of the many construction related trades as an employee or owner.

One local program "Careers in Construction" does just that. Barber credits the ongoing program, which is located at Nevada Partners on West Lake Mead in the Historic Las Vegas Westside area, with serving more than 100 participants.

Clarence Williams, spokesperson for Nevada Partners (facilitator of the training program in accordance with a grant received by the organization) agrees that providing a place and a way for locals to get higher paying jobs is good for Las Vegas.

Barber said that jobs in his industry are "historically the highest paying jobs." Williams agreed with that and said they are the highest "in the country."

"We provide training for at-risk youth and young adults to get them ready to pass the apprenticeship tests to work in the trade of their choice," Barber said.

"The second largest industry in Nevada is construction," according to Barber.

"For our membership we have the Major Corporate Partners Program." He said the NAMC works with companies like local gaming giants MGM and Harrah's and other local and national corporations to get a larger share of business for members.

Barber said that one of the greatest challenges and key goals is to help members "build capacity." In particular, he said that the "NAMC has training in order for our members to increase their business capacities to take on larger projects."

"We always have a special eye for building capacity. Failure is not an option," Barber emphasized.

Barber said it is crucial for minority contractors who are seeking a larger share of construction dollars to be in a position to handle larger volume contracts in every way—bonding, staffing, equipment, and other performance requirements and abilities.

"It's one thing to say it...

it's another to be able to do it," Barber stated.

There are several large general contracting firms in Las Vegas that are NAMC members.

One of them, Thor Construction Inc., is reportedly one of the largest Black-owned construction companies in the U.S., according to President Richard Coleman who relocated to Nevada from Minnesota.

"I was in business for 5 or 6 years before I started participating [in NAMC]," Coleman recalled.

"I was young, and thought I could do it on my own... The organization has provided me with a place where others can advocate for me," he said, noting that he has been a member for about 20 years.

"I am now one of the five largest Black contractors in the nation [based on gross revenues]. I can now help the organization..." Coleman said.

As a part of his commitment to helping, he added, "We have opened an incubator for some minority companies to get a start. We're happy to host that right inside our offices."

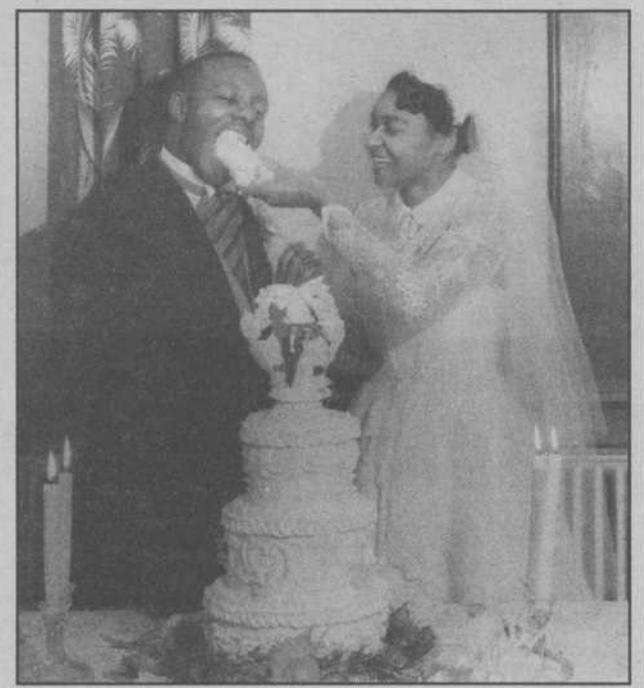
Over the years, there have been many complaints from civil rights organizations, most notably the NAACP's accelerated efforts which resulted in public forums in 2000 and discussions with the business community, especially gaming properties, about opening up the field for minorities.

The questions of how much opportunity is here in the local market today, and how far the local business community has advanced were answered by Barber and Coleman from their own business experiences.

Barber, who is owner of TBL Construction Inc., said there is a lot of opportunity for minority firms in the local market. Taking all areas of construction needs into account, "there are more opportunities than there are [minority-owned] companies to fill them," Barber said.

"We have been having a lot of success because of the need in the area," he added. As an upcoming example, Barber said that the "City Center Project" involving several hotel and casino properties on the Strip will be unveiled at a session during the convention to open opportunities for greater minority business participation.

"We [NAMC affiliates] are partners with the MGM. Although we have no goals or quotas, we are expecting around 30 percent to 40 percent participation by minori-



Las Vegas residents Robert and Marion Bell at their nuptials 50 years ago (right) and during their 50-year anniversary.

Couple celebrates 50 years together

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Las Vegas residents Robert and Marion Bell, their family and friends from 15 U.S. states and Paris, France, gathered to celebrate the 50th wedding anniversary of the couple at the Flamingo Hilton Hotel last Saturday.

In addition to honoring their anniversary, the couple used the occasion to help raise money for the Bennett College for Women in Greensboro, NC, from which Marion Lee Bell graduated in 1953.

All four of the Bells' children attended: Kristie Bell-Petershock who lives in France; Kelvin Bell, from Durham, NC; Kamin Bell, the Navy's first Black female helicopter

pilot, currently working in Irvine, Calif; and Keane Bell who works for a hotel chain in Virginia.

The Bells received contributions and congratulatory messages from over 400 people.

Among those responding were Senator Harry Reid; Representative Shelley Berkley; Dr. Johnnetta Cole, president of Bennett College, along with alumnae, members of the staff, faculty, student body and the college board of trustees. Invited guests were asked to contribute to the Bennett College Alumnae Annual Fund in lieu of gifts. The celebration raised more than \$10,000 for the historic women's college.

ties [in construction contracts]," he explained.

Coleman, speaking without hesitation, said that when he arrived a few years ago he assessed that "for African-Americans, this construction economy has been exclusionary."

Where Black-owned firms were concerned, he stopped short of saying that it was a crime how few construction businesses got significant contracts or large portions.

He was reluctant to quote specifics, but was talking around \$3 million in terms of money spent by major corporations with local Black-owned construction companies.

"The largest minority [Black-owned] contractor three years ago did such a small amount of business I couldn't believe it," Copeland said describing the condition as he saw it when he relocated his 25-year-old company here.

"That's why there was such a cry for corporations to [change their practices]," he said.

Copeland shared what he thinks brought about the "historic change" from then to now and the improvements in opportunities for his general contracting firm and other Black-owned companies today.

"I've heard an inkling of what brought it about — some individuals," he said,

adding that the efforts of the NAMC and further advocacy efforts have made a big difference. And as for the corporations themselves, he acknowledged, "They have stepped up to the plate [in a big way]."

Copeland added, "The gaming industry is the most responsive."

According to Barber, the outlook for continued growth for Blacks in construction, here and across the country

is promising.

"Success breeds success," Copeland said and continued, "When we have more competent, qualified capable minority contractors in this market, other entities — city, state [and private corporations] will take notice."

Barber is especially optimistic about the economic impact of the organization's outreach to youth and women. He said some of the immediate goals for the or-

ganization are aimed at expanding opportunities for them.

He said that things look good for women in construction, calling attention to the fact that Executive Director Linda Lewis has been in her position with NAMC Nevada for three years.

"She does a superb job," Barber added.

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