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The Orlando Events Center

Venues' MWBE Community Connection

When smart business people work together, everyone profits

ORLANDO - Deloris Batson knows exactly how many contracts have been awarded to minorities and women for Orlando's new Events Center project. As the Minority and Women Business Enterprise (MWBE) coordinator, it's her job to ensure a smooth and strong relationship between them and the major contractors with whom they are working under the Community Venues BLUEPRINT initiative.

Although Deloris technically works for the developer - in this case, the Events Center Development LLC - she also considers herself an advocate for minority business owners like Willard Holmes, Jr. of True Power Electric and women business owners including Leila Nodarse of Nodarse & Associates. Deloris believes that hiring certified minority and women-owned companies is good business for everyone.

"The Events Center will be a 'historical event' for our city," Deloris says. "Everyone needs to remember that these minority and women-owned firms must feed their families, pay their rent (and mortgages), and pay their people. We've got to help them in whatever way we can. And many of them really believe in giving back to the community, through training and mentoring programs."

"It's true that doors are often shut to minority and women owned firms," Deloris says. "The BLUEPRINT initiative opens those doors - and once it's



Deloris Batson

apparent that these firms have what it takes to produce an exceptional product or service, they will be hired again and again."

That is what happened with Willard Holmes' company. His electrical firm has been contracted for subsequent jobs within the Venues project. However, like many MWBEs, Holmes was initially unaware that some unplanned costs could potentially decrease his profits.

"Minorities and women-owned firms may feel as though they can't ask questions or even choose to walk away from a project. I'm here to help them discover that they have the same rights as any other business. MWBEs also have to learn things like covering the cost of DCIP (Developers Control Insurance Program) in their proposals, because without DCIP, schedule slips and other factors could strip the MWBE business of their profit."

Overall, Deloris notes that many MWBEs are proactive in their own success. "Many of these minority and women-owned companies have done the right thing. They've gone

to special classes, educated themselves on pricing and on the scope of the work necessary," says Deloris. "Some, like True Power's Willard Holmes, also mentor and train others, many of whom live in Orlando's poorest neighborhoods, by offering free or low-cost classes or apprenticeships. They are doing the right thing. That's good for the community, it's good for the local economy and workforce, and it's good for Orlando's future."

An Orlando resident her entire life, Deloris, 49, began her career as a residential loan officer and hub manager for Sun Bank. She then worked for Orange County in the MWBE department.

The Events Center is part of a \$1.1 billion arts, sports and entertainment project being built throughout downtown Orlando. The massive public/private partnership also includes the Dr. P. Phillips Orlando Performing Arts Center and renovations to the Citrus Bowl. Deloris is thrilled to play her part in this massive venture.

"I believe sincerely in giving back, in making sure minority and women owned businesses have the necessary tools for success," Deloris says. "I try to help them in whatever way I can and at the same time, ensure a positive outcome for all parties. I firmly believe that I've got to give back to my community as well."

Construction on the Events Center is expected to be complete in late 2010.