

Performing Arts Center Sharing the Wealth

Written by Administrator

Thursday, 16 October 2008 18:00 - Last Updated Monday, 20 October 2008 16:15

There is no question but that the Venues Project incorporates conceptually stunning ideas for downtown Orlando development. Part of the plan calls for what is clearly a state-of-the-art performing arts facility that would be a major draw for tourists and locals. It is also planned to be a center for arts education. World class.

But whenever the City of Orlando decides to build a major facility, our thoughts turn to how the millions of dollars in contracts will be awarded. Will minority and women-owned businesses have a seat at the table? Will adequate consideration be given to awarding contracts to local, as opposed to out-of-state, concerns? These are certainly legitimate questions in any discussion about spending public dollars. If our community is to take pride in the performing arts center, the story must begin with the participation of all available and qualified firms from the building's foundation to its interior-- and specifically including businesses owned by local area blacks.

Memories of unfulfilled promises made to the black community when the Amway Arena was being built are all too fresh for some of us.

Building the growth of African American businesses and making sure that larger contractors include them in bids is critical to the success of such projects.

It's the right thing to do.

It's the political thing to do.

And, sometimes, it actually gets done.

Though the curtain hasn't yet come down on the first act, it looks as though the [Dr. P. Phillips Orlando Performing Arts Center](#) is at least making a serious run at inclusion.

Through July of this year, the performing arts center had awarded more than \$6 million in contracts to minority firms and another \$1.8 million to women-owned businesses on the project. How does this compare to total spending? Together, minority and women-owned businesses have garnered more than 33 percent of all of the performing arts center's contracts and subcontracts. Those contracts cover a variety of work on the facility, including pre-construction, design, materials testing and engineering.

As we watch the severe impact of the current financial crisis on our community, we know that seeking out qualified and experienced minority and women-owned firms is even more vital to our local and national economy. Each of those companies and the jobs they generate affect our

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community. It's our community's responsibility to make sure they have a chance to work on marquee projects. Projects on the scale of the performing arts center can bolster and sustain minority businesses through these tough economic times.

In the words of [Texas Tech](#) sports information director [Ralph Carpenter](#) , "the opera ain't over til the fat lady sings." There is a long journey to the venue's completion. But if city officials keep their eyes on the ball, even more minority and women-owned businesses-- including those who stand outside the more traditional construction areas-- will benefit from the performing arts center.

We applaud Mayor Buddy Dyer and Commissioner Daisy Lynum for their leadership in making sure African American businesses truly benefit from projects such as this one. And we look forward to more good news coming from the performing arts center, even before the first note is sung.