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Power of Diversity conference attracts 600 to Nazareth

By [Mary Chao](#)
Democrat and Chronicle



AIMEE K. WILES

Nadine Earl Carey portrays a woman promoted over disgruntled white co-workers, played by Mark Almekinder, left, Gregory Nunn and Mary Catherine Bosner, in a skit at the diversity conference.

(May 16, 2002) — More than 600 business people and educators from across Rochester attended the biennial Power of Diversity Conference Tuesday and Wednesday at Nazareth College.



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The conference -- sponsored by the Greater Rochester Diversity Council -- is one of the largest workplace diversity seminars in the country and serves as a model for other communities.

This year's conference, "Hear It! Live It! Feel It!," featured some of the nation's top diversity speakers such as Robert C. Henderson and human rights activist Samuel Betances. Henderson is the founder of Air Atlanta, the nation's first black-owned airline, and a consultant on President Clinton's race initiative.

As chairwoman of the ethnic staff and faculty committee at Rochester Institute of Technology, Sarah Reynolds does a lot of diversity training on campus. She was eager to absorb all the conference had to offer -- more than 20 workshops dealing with religion, disability, work/life balance and engaging white men as full diversity partners.

"I'm hoping I'll come away with new ideas to help the institute with diversity initiatives," Reynolds, 52, said before attending the "Talk the Walk" seminar.

"Talk the Walk" featured professional actors demonstrating a fictitious diversity conflict situation.

The troupe performed a skit in which a black woman was selected to participate in a highly coveted management training program over other employees, causing friction with other workers. A white co-worker passed over for the program automatically assumed the black woman was able to climb the corporate ladder because of the company's policy to promote minorities.

"I'm tired of everyone thinking I got to where I am because I am a black female," said "Ann," portrayed by actress Nadine Earl Carey.

The troupe then worked with the audience of about 50 to find ways to resolve the conflict. Audience

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members suggested that the manager be open with employees and explain to each applicant personally why Ann was chosen over others.

"It presented a real life situation -- things that truly happen in real situations," Reynolds said.

Reynolds, an African-American, said she sometimes feels as if she has to justify why she gets plum assignments in her job as an RIT librarian. To compensate for promotions, "I feel I have to do things better," she said.

Karen Berwind, 42, is secretary to Eastman Kodak Co.'s chief diversity officer, May Snowden. Learning how to solve workplace conflicts is important in her position, Berwind said, so she decided to attend the theater production.

"I'd like to get different views on different issues," she said.

Thomas Richards, president and chief executive officer of RGS Energy Group Inc., parent of Rochester Gas and Electric Corp., kicked off Wednesday's events. He talked about the increasing diversity of the Rochester community, filled with new immigrants from Asian, Latin and Middle Eastern countries.

While getting -- and keeping -- the issue of workplace diversity on the table at RG&E has not always been easy, the utility has put in good faith efforts with employee education and retention programs, he said.

"We have to learn and accept the idea that the more varied the ideas and people invited to the table, the stronger and sounder will be the input, and the sounder the overall mission," he said.





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