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# 400 focus on diversity

## Forum attracts participants nationwide

Mary Chao  
 Staff writer

(September 14, 2004) — They work at organizations as diverse as NASA and Genesee Region Home Care. Some are driving across town and others have taken a plane across the country.

All of those attending Diversity2004, though, have one goal in common: to keep diversity in the workplace a main focus for employers.

This is the first year that the Greater Rochester Diversity Council has marketed its three-day conference — one of the most extensive conferences on diversity at work — to companies nationwide, said Mike Streeter, the council's executive director. As a result, more than 400 people from 20 states have registered for seminars that range from managing cultural differences to religion in the workplace and health care issues.

"It's an opportunity to meet and talk with people who are doing the same things you are," Streeter said. "Most of the breakthrough ideas come from talking to people."

Sessions today will include a CEOs' forum on leadership in diversity issues



Diversity Training Group of Virginia President Mauricio Velasquez, right, diversity consultant Willard Eng of Los Angeles and Joan Buccigrossi of wetWare Inc. of Rochester share views at Diversity 2004 here on Monday.

[[Day in Photos](#)]

### If you go

It's not too late to attend the Diversity2004 conference at the Riverside Convention Center. The event will continue from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. today and 7:15 a.m. to 6 p.m. Wednesday. The cost is \$300 for Greater Rochester Diversity Council members and \$360 for nonmembers for today's sessions and \$200 for GRDC members and \$250 for nonmembers on Wednesday. There is also a health care symposium Wednesday afternoon that costs \$125 for members and \$150 for


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moderated by Terry Simmons, chief executive and managing partner of Simmons Associates Inc. The day's sessions also will include a presentation by comedian Rain Pryor, the daughter of Richard Pryor, who recently presented the one-woman show *Fried Chicken & Latkes* to sold-out crowds in Beverly Hills.

On Wednesday, the conference at the Riverside Convention Center will feature keynote speaker Dr. David Satcher, the former U.S. surgeon general. There also will be a separate session on health care issues that day.

Amy Nicholson works daily with patients from varying backgrounds as a nursing supervisor at the local Genesee Region Home Care's hospice program. She decided to attend the diversity conference to hone her skills as a health care practitioner.

"If you can understand your own beliefs, you're certainly more sensitive as to where other people are coming from," she said.

Katheryn Thomas, 46, an administrative assistant at National Aeronautics and Space Administration in Washington, D.C., said there are still challenges in the area of diversity.

"Everyone is not going to come on board. The challenge is to reach those who are not on board," Thomas said. "We're not there yet."

Diversity consultant Willard Eng traveled from Los Angeles, Calif., for the opportunity to snare potential clients and share diversity ideas.

"It's a good opportunity to network with colleagues," Eng said.

Strides made in workplace diversity often depend on the leadership at the company, he said.

"There are some further down the path," Eng said. "Others newer to the idea are still struggling with how to do this."

Downsizing at some companies may have hurt diversity efforts, said Cindy Palumbo, 38, Rochester manager for staffing agency The Yoh Co.

"There are so many people available right now, we're forgetting about some underrepresented groups."

Despite downsizing at Eastman Kodak Co., diversity remains top priority, said David Kassnoff, manager of communications and public relations for global diversity at Kodak. He said Chief Executive Dan Carp has told employees the company "will not blink when it comes to diversity," despite economic challenges.

That means in a downsizing, managers are mindful that no specific group is more adversely affected than another, he said.

The conference's first keynote speaker was Essie Calhoun, chief diversity officer at Kodak, the conference's principal sponsor.



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She talked about Rochester's heritage in diversity, being home to abolitionist Frederick Douglass, women's rights advocate Susan B. Anthony and the Underground Railroad, which helped slaves travel to the north.

Calhoun also talked about Kodak founder George Eastman's support of diversity.

"We take that heritage and see it as a foundation on this journey of diversity and inclusion," Calhoun said.

The conference Monday also featured William Guillory, CEO of Innovations International Inc. in Salt Lake City. He talked about cultural competence in health care and inclusion of different cultures.

Implementing diversity goals begins at the top, he said.

To be truly inclusive, diversity "requires the transformation in thinking and understanding of those who make policies in the existing culture," he said.

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