

THE DAILY RECORD

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Three-Day Diversity Conference Focuses On Inclusion

BY NORA A. JONES,
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Yolanda King, daughter of the late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and former U.S. Surgeon General Dr. David Satcher were among the nationally recognized keynote speakers who shared their comments at the 2004 Diversity Conference recently held at the Riverside Convention Center.

Part One Of Five

The Greater Rochester Diversity Council organized this three day program that included more than 50 concurrent workshops covering a range of topics from "Diversity Recruiting Without Affirmative Action" to "Managing Across Cultures" to "Transsexuals in the Workplace." In addition to the workshops, several dozen companies and organizations shared information in the exhibit hall, and community executives shared their experience and vision in a panel discussion.

Commitment To Social Change

King, CEO of Higher Ground Productions, is dedicated to teaching people to celebrate diversity and embrace unity. She has lectured or performed in 49 of the 50 states and in various international venues. For her Rochester appearance, she shared several inspirational stories and poems from a book she recently published in collaboration with Elodia Tate.

Open My Eyes, Open My Soul is a collection of short stories and poems compiled to share insights of innocent children who know nothing of racial differences and other human experiences that remind us that in the end, we are all related. The most important part of us is the same no matter what our cultural background may be.

Eliminating Health Care Disparities

While serving as U.S. Surgeon General from 1998 to 2002, Dr. Satcher spearheaded the development of "Healthy People 2010" — a national initiative to eliminate racial and ethnic disparities in health care and increase the years and quality of life.

"In order to eliminate disparities, we must care enough, know enough, be willing to do enough, and be persistent enough to change the current paradigm," Dr. Satcher said, noting several causes for current inequities. "Certain populations are more likely to grow up near hazardous waste, or



PHOTO BY NORA A. JONES

CHAMPIONS OF SOCIAL CHANGE — Eastman Kodak's Chief Diversity Officer Essie Calhoun (at the podium) introduces lunchtime speakers and co-authors Elodia Tate and Yolanda King.

live where physical safety isn't ensured. Many are uninsured or underinsured, or live in rural or inner city areas that are under-served due to insufficient medical staffing and facilities. Many are under-represented because their language or culture may limit their ability to express their illnesses."

Earning his M.D. and Ph.D. from Case Western Reserve University, Dr. Satcher has been a champion of healthy lifestyles throughout his career. In the 1970s he was recognized as one of the nation's experts on sickle cell anemia. He is currently the director of the National Center for Primary Care at the Morehouse School of Medicine in Atlanta.

From 1993 to 1998, Dr. Satcher served as director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and administrator of the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry. During his term as U.S. Surgeon General, Dr. Satcher released 14 reports on topics including suicide prevention, oral health, youth violence prevention and overweight and obesity.

In his address that closed the 2004 Diversity Conference and opened a half day Health Care Symposium, Dr. Satcher stated that "left unabated, obesity will overtake smoking as a leading cause of death in the United States."

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He also reported that 40,000 people die from the flu every year.

"Minorities are often hit hardest because lack of insurance or lack of education prevents many from getting vaccinations," he said.

Kodak's Essie Calhoun

Chief Diversity Officer and Director of Eastman Kodak Co., Essie L. Calhoun spoke at the opening session of the conference, noting George Eastman hired women and blacks into corporate jobs at a time when such "inclusion" was not common.

"In the spirit of continual improvement, Kodak has made a business case for diversity," Calhoun noted. "In our quest for the best employees and best products, our CEO won't risk excluding anyone's contributions. Inclusion is a business necessity — not just a moral imperative."

Acknowledging the strength of CEO Dan Carp's leadership, Calhoun quoted him as stating "We will not blink when it comes to diversity."

Calhoun went on to discuss the business case approach to "justifying" diversity.

"Growth opportunities arise from multi-cultural marketing," she said. "By being a fair and caring employer, we build loyalty, which in turn means employee retention, which saves millions of dollars in retraining. Diversity is also good business because it prevents discrimination litigation."

"There's no magic wand," Calhoun concluded. "It comes down to influencing people; changing their attitudes to interact effectively in the workplace. In simple terms, diversity is driven by leadership, leadership, leadership."

Diversity leaders from many other companies were in the audience and in tune with Calhoun's message. Attendees included a cross-section of the private and public sector from 20 states besides New York.

Other Key Speakers

Dr. William Guillory, CEO of Innovations International, Inc. spoke about "cultural competence" in a session that completed the first day of the conference.

On the morning of the second day, Terry Simmons, CEO of Simmons Associates, Inc., served as moderator for a panel discussion that included Danny Wegman, president of Wegman's Food Markets, Inc.; Michael Finney, president and CEO of Greater Rochester Enterprise; David



PHOTO BY JNORA A. JONES

EXHIBIT HALL — Thomson West was one of more than 20 exhibitors outside the classrooms at the Diversity Conference 2004. From right to left, displaying various legal products dealing with human resource issues are: Denise Van Houton, Carol Huse and Jeannine Sims.

Binkley, senior vice president of HR at Whirlpool Corp. and Dr. Al Simone, president, Rochester Institute of Technology.

"While many of the speakers held my attention at the conference, none did so more than Dr. Simone," said Sheila Gaddis, executive director of Volunteer Legal Services Project, Inc. "He said that diversity and inclusion at RIT is of utmost importance, and he is committed to providing an environment that fosters respect for each person irrespective of background, race, age, gender, disability, values, sexual orientation, religion or other interests."

"What was so refreshing, is he didn't stop there," Gaddis continued. "He went on to say that not everyone gets it and that managers that do not get it are fired or transferred. He won't accept anything less. Clearly he wants RIT to be the benchmark for attracting, developing and retaining a diverse workforce and leadership team. I can't wait to hear his next speech!"

For entertainment, Rain Pryor (daughter of comedian Richard Pryor), presented portions of her one-woman show: "Fried Chicken & Latkes" to conclude the second day of the conference.

Dr. Sondra Thiederman, president of Cross-Cultural Communications, talked about "Bias Free Leadership: Your Competitive Advantage" in the opening session on the third day of the conference.

Read more about Dr. Thiederman's comments in part four of this series.