

The Philadelphia
Tribune
OP-ED

The Philadelphia Tribune
Tuesday, March 7, 1995

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DRPA Proves Affirmative Action Can Succeed

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The Delaware River Port Authority's Minority Business Enterprise (MBE) and Women Business Enterprise (WBE) program was developed to ensure that the DRPA aggressively pursues contracting, consulting, and procurement opportunities for minority and women business enterprises.

The objective of the MBE and WBE program is to ensure that minority and female contractors, consultants and vendors are afforded the maximum opportunity to participate commensurate with their abilities and in proportion to their availability in the DRPA's contracting, consulting and procurement process. In short, the DRPA seeks to create a "level playing field" for everyone.

The MBE and WBE program is not a set-aside program or a quota system but a non-discriminating program. It Program also does not

attempt to remedy past discrimination. In short, the MBE and WBE Program requires a Bidder/Proposer not to discriminate when soliciting for and committing to subcontractors, sub-consultants and suppliers.

While the MBE and WBE program seeks to ensure participation of MBE and WBE firms as subcontractors, sub-consultants and suppliers, it by no means precludes MBE and WBE firms from bidding on or proposing for DRPA construction contracts and consulting agreements as prime contractors or prime consultants.

Between 1989 and 1993 the DRPA spent approximately \$88 million on professional service agreements, construction contracts, engineer payments, good and services. Of that amount, approximately \$2.3 million or three percent was awarded to minorities. In 1994, my first year as Executive Director, the DPRA spent about \$25 million for the same services with \$4.6 mil-

lion or 18.5 percent to minorities.

Between 1989 and 1993 the DRPA spent almost \$23 million purchase orders with one million or 4.67 percent going to minorities. In 1994 the total value of all purchases orders was six million with \$600,000 or 10 percent going to minorities.

While the percentages and dollars spell good news for minorities, that is only part of the story. The real story is that an efficient, dedicated manager can make affirmative action work without violating the spirit or the letter of the law. Our first mission is to provide excellence at the lowest possible price for the consumer. We expect nothing less for any program we participate in. At the DRPA, consumer confidence is our most important service.

Our success in making these dramatic changes is due to our determination to open the process to all

people. Recently, the DRPA has gained access to the New Jersey Department of Commerce and Economic Development on-line Selective Assistance Vendor Information System (Savi-II).

Savi-II allows the user to call up a list of contractors, vendors and suppliers by name, location, commercial code and product. The database has the potential of enhancing the DRPA ability to employ the services of any one of more than 34,000 small businesses, minority and women-owned business in New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

Our success in making dramatic changes is due to our determination to increase the skills of our people. We are constantly enhancing the skills of our staff through training and professional development.

Staff members recently participated in an intensive training program sponsored by Morgan State University. Upon successful completion of the program, our staff will be officially designated Certi-

fied Compliance Administrators.

Our success in making these dramatic changes is our determination to encourage mainstream firms to utilize minorities at all levels. The DPRA has an interest in and a commitment to affirmative action. The participation of qualified and certified minorities is of great importance to us.

As we look ahead to the challenges that confront us, we will continue to search out and expand our efforts to seek new firms and vendors to participate in the constructing, consulting and procurement process. We will also continue to seek innovative strategies that will enable minorities to participate on more DRPA projects in the capacity of prime contractors and consultants. We are committed to policies and programs that will enable the DRPA to mirror the multicultural world in which we all live.

Paul Drayton is executive director of the DRPA.