

1999 URBAN WHEEL

Executive of the year:

A Successful Executive

It's hard to listen to Ronald Goldsberry recount the events that brought him to Ford without shaking your head in disbelief and wondering how he has managed to pack so much experience into a relatively short, but remarkable career.

Goldsberry is a scientist and teacher at heart, and over the past three decades the Delaware native has been a chemistry professor, NASA researcher and inventor.

When he decided to try his luck in corporate America, Goldsberry became a celebrated management guru, then a successful manager under noted industrialist Armand Hammer, before eventually landing at Ford.

Since January, Goldsberry has been Ford's vice president of Global Service Business Strategy. Goldsberry was voted African Americans On Wheels' 1999 Edward Davis Executive of the Year, and was recently honored at the annual Urban Wheel Awards in Detroit. He is the third recipient of this award, joining General Motors' Roy Roberts (1997) and George Frame (1998).

As a star among Ford's high-level executives and an African American, Goldsberry embodies the spirit of the Davis Award. While he is not ready to declare that the auto industry is vastly different for minorities looking for management positions than it was when he joined Ford seven years ago, he said the industry has made substantial strides.

"I wouldn't say that it's easier, but I would certainly say that more opportunities are there and will be there in the future. One of the reasons for this is that the industry has understood that diversity is important to the way you do business," Goldsberry explained.

His new responsibilities at Ford include developing and implementing the automaker's global aftermarket and service business strategies. The promotion comes at a time when the automaker is positioning itself as a "consumer company," where it hopes to provide one-stop shopping for customers. Goldsberry will help the automaker develop relationships with its customers by linking sales with other services, including maintenance and repair, insurance and rental vehicles.

"One of the things I'm trying to do now is connect those products and services in the consumers' minds and then connect them internally from a Ford standpoint," Goldsberry said. "That provides a tremendous opportunity for us to be able to grow those businesses."

The energetic executive has a reputation of faring well in uncharted waters. If you ask, he'll tell you that success has come through hard work, an uncanny knack for seeking the right



opportunities. He went to Stanford for his Ph.D. and worked on the Apollo and Gemini programs. He earned a patent for developing a high-temperature plastic material for the space program. The wealth being created in nearby Silicon Valley enticed the young scientist to attempt to market his invention, but unfortunately, he lacked marketing experience.

After earning an MBA from Stanford University in the early 1970s, Goldsberry headed back east to work for the Boston Consulting Group (BCG), known for innovative organizational models that made companies run more efficiently. The firm's client roster included a Who's Who of Fortune 500 companies such as Hewlett-Packard and Exxon Corp., giving Goldsberry exposure to some of the top managers in the country.

"It was invaluable experience and really shaped my management style because I could see different executives working in different environments in a variety of industries," he said.

In the mid-1970s, Goldsberry was hired away from BCG by Gulf Oil Co. as a vice president, and sent to the company's operations in Europe. He studied hard and had a lot of support from upper management to overcome the challenge of being a young African American executive and a non-Texan in the oil business.

It was in his next job as vice president of business and planning with Hammer's Occidental Petroleum, where he got connected to Ford. After a stint at Occidental's chemical division, Goldsberry ran Parker Chemical, the company's specialty division in Detroit. When Occidental sold Parker, Goldsberry attempted a leveraged buyout, but was outbid by Ford. He stayed on as president and COO of Parker, and later moved to Ford.

He's been there ever since and even teaches occasionally, as part of Ford's Business Leadership Initiative. The program allows its executives to teach their philosophies to teams in other parts of the company.

Goldsberry's advice to young professionals looking to make it in the corporate world is to find a mentor early on. It's not always easy finding the right one, he admits.

His commitment to mentorship runs deep. Goldsberry is active as a mentor and fund-raiser for the Detroit Area Pre-College Engineering Program, known popularly as DAPCEP. For 22 years the privately-funded group has been motivating and preparing minority youth for careers in engineering, science and math-related fields.