

Reaffirming Our Commitment

(From left) W. Frank Fountain, DaimlerChrysler's senior vice president of government affairs; Dr. Dieter Zetsche, DaimlerChrysler's CEO; Randi Payton, president and CEO of On Wheels, Inc., and Debra Nelson, a DaimlerChrysler senior manager.

On January 11, 2001, we held our Fifth Annual Urban Wheel Awards in Detroit. The awards were held during the press preview week for the North American International Auto Show (NAIAS), unquestionably the most influential car and truck show in the world. The purpose of the Urban Wheel Awards is to celebrate diversity in the auto industry, and to recognize the efforts of those companies and individuals who are practicing diversity in their work environments.

The Chrysler PT Cruiser was selected as "Vehicle of the Year." On hand to accept the award was DaimlerChrysler CEO Dieter Zetsche. General Motors was named "Company of the Year," and CEO Rick Wagoner was there to accept the award. Sitting in the audience were CEOs, presidents and executive vice presidents of Volkswagen, Jaguar, Toyota, Mitsubishi, Nissan, Audi, GMAC and others. There is no other event hosted by any other group that draws together so many powerful people in the industry than the Urban Wheel Awards.

These executives came to network, to learn and to share and to reaffirm their commitment to inclusion. They came to gain greater awareness of diversity. It is here where we celebrated our achievements and admitted our shortcomings. It is in this setting that we recognized those who have gone above and beyond, and reflected on what more we need to do.

You would think that such a prestigious event, with such a positive mission, would be newsworthy. But in an era

where shootings and drug raids in the African-American communities make front-page news in mainstream media, it's no wonder that an event of this magnitude drew little attention in the mainstream press or media.

That's why we, as a black-owned company, remain committed to you. As we move deeper into 2001, we do so with you in mind, knowing that if we were not here, a key part of the automotive picture would be missing. And in an era where many black-owned companies are merging with mainstream partners, we stand committed to our roots.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. had a dream, and so do we. We are proud of our heritage and what we offer to you, our readers, and the auto industry.

So as we celebrate another Black History Month, we do so as the only African-American owned multimedia company that continues to build bridges between you and the multi-billion dollar automotive industry.

Congratulations to all of our 2001 Urban Wheel Award recipients. And a special expression of gratitude to all of the African-American men and women who continue to break new ground for all of us in the auto industry, including those companies and individuals who are working to create an environment of inclusion for all.

Randi Payton