

BUSINESS

Minority Trade Show Builds Alliances

Nate Moreland establishes leads for new business and strategic alliances at the Oregon Association of Minority Entrepreneurs Trade Show at the Oregon Convention Center. Moreland is the director of OAME's Youth Entrepreneurship Program.



Pricilla Hulin of Ramada Inn and Suites makes personal contacts with representatives of minority, woman and emerging small businesses at the Oregon Association of Minority Entrepreneurs Trade Show.

PHOTOS BY MARK WASHINGTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Small and large businesses, state and federal government agencies and business development resources packed into the Oregon Convention Center last week for the Pacific Northwest's largest minority, woman and emerging small business luncheon and tradeshow.

The annual event by the Oregon Association of Minority Entrepreneurs is held to build strategic alliances for Hispanic American, African American, Asian American, Native American and European American businesses.

"The OAME Trade Show is a personal, face-to-face forum to make sales, network and obtain resources among large and small, new entrepreneurs, business development and coaching resources," said Sam Brooks, OAME founder, president and chairman of the board.

More than 150 small and large business, state and federal government agencies and business development resources, were represented at the show.

Mara Cohen, a Native American and owner of a successful consulting firm, was the conference's keynote speaker.

"We've had staff reductions of 30 percent while other agencies have grown," Gardner said. "We're at the bare bones of getting our mission done. The bone is getting into the marrow."

Besides enforcing state wage and civil rights laws, Gardner's office manages a \$4.9 million wage security fund that covers workers whose employers close without issuing final paychecks. It also oversees the state's 6,000 apprenticeship trainees as they learn on-the-job trade and business skills.

Setback for Worker Rights

Wage protections, civil rights and apprenticeships take hit

(AP)— Enforcement of worker rights has declined with cutbacks at the state agency responsible for protecting those rights, attorneys say.

The Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries has already shed about a quarter of its staff and once again finds itself the target of cuts. This time, the agency could eliminate at least 11 of its 114-member staff overseeing civil rights laws, wage protections and apprenticeship programs.

"People aren't getting any substantial justice because there are no meaningful investigations occurring," said Daniel Snyder, a Portland attorney who represents workers pursuing complaints against employers.

For most workers, the bureau is the first stop for complaints about harassment, improper pay, poor

workplace conditions and child labor violations.

Labor Commissioner Dan Gardner, elected last year, admits the agency faces challenges investigating complaints but blames

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much of the problem on the previous commissioner.

Gardner replaced former Labor Commissioner Jack Roberts, a two-term Republican who in 1997 proposed eliminating the bureau and folding its duties into another state agency. Legislators rejected that idea, but over time, they approved budgets that whittled away at bu-

reau programs.

Gardner is trying to preserve the two civil rights investigators by saving money elsewhere. He's proposing to renegotiate office leases, consolidate bureau offices in Medford and Salem with other state agencies and tap the wage security fund to foot some administrative costs.

New Data to Address Insurance Gap

(AP)— Aetna Inc. has begun collecting data on the racial and ethnic backgrounds of some of its 14 million health plan members in what the insurer says is intended to narrow the gaps in treatment between whites and minority patients. Aetna said it is trying to understand differences in how white and minority patients get medical care, and develop prevention, education and treatment programs to narrow the gap.

The company began the initiative in 13 states in September, asking new members or those changing health plans or beneficiaries to voluntarily list their race or ethnic status in their applications.

"Reducing the gap in health care among minority populations is one of the most obvious targets for health care improvement in the United States," said John Rowe, chairman and chief executive officer of Aetna. "The scientific com-

munity and the federal government have acknowledged that systematic efforts on the part of insurers such as Aetna can have a dramatic impact on disparities in health care, and I am very proud of the initiatives that we have undertaken to date."

Aetna cited a January 2001 letter from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to the Health Insurance Association of America targeting the elimination of racial and ethnic disparities in health care.

Jobs Scarce in African American Communities

(AP)— The distance between blacks and job opportunities narrowed across the nation during the 1990s, although African Americans remained the most segregated ethnic group from employment opportunities, according to a new study.

The analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data by the Brookings Institution found blacks' overall proximity to jobs improved slightly during the 1990s.

But no group was more physically isolated from jobs than blacks, the study found. In nearly all metropolitan areas with significant black populations, the separation between residences and jobs was much higher for blacks than whites.

"We have designed our metropolitan area in ways that reduce opportunities for potential black job seekers," said Wayne State University urban affairs professor George

Galster. The study, he said, shows "continuing evidence of a phenomenon referred to as spatial racism."

Using 2000 census figures, researchers compared where people of different races live to where the jobs are found. They then determined what percentage of the population of any race would have to move to a different neighborhood for that race to be equally interspersed among all available jobs.

Investigation of Utility Misconduct Wanted

In a draft report on its investigation into questionable trading activities during the western energy crisis of 2001, the staff of the Oregon Public Utility Commission recommends that the commission open a formal investigation into

possible mismanagement by Portland General Electric.

PUC officials said the investigation would focus on PGE's involvement in Enron "Death Star" type transactions and its failure to post its trades property with Enron, the

bankrupt Texas company that owns the Portland utility.

But the commission's staff recommends delaying any action on possible misconduct by PGE until the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission completes its review.

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