

Youth Gain Tools for Entrepreneurial Success

OAME trains future business leaders

BY MINDY COOPER
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One local non-profit organization has made it their mission to train future minority business leaders as a way to fight discrimination and racism throughout the region.

Founded in 1987, the Oregon Association of Minority Entrepreneurs is a non-profit organization dedicated to increasing economic development for minorities within the states of Oregon and Washington.

"It is very difficult to do any community service yourself, when you are in need of services," said Samuel Brooks, OAME founder and board chair. He said working with young people has always been an abiding part of the mission of the organization.

"Whether we like it or not, they are going to be the leaders of the future," said Brooks. "And whether they like it or not, they



Students at a youth conference sponsored by the Oregon Association of Minority Entrepreneurs work on their business plans.

are going to be the leaders of our future. We have to be committed to our young people."

The Association, through partnerships with minority entrepreneurs, educational institutions, government, the community and

established businesses, is dedicated all year long to provide Portland's youth with opportunities to learn how to be successful in the business world.

According to Brooks, the Youth program, which has for-

mally been in place for almost 13-years, has provided opportunities for 600 to 800 young individuals within the community who have participated in the various available opportunities.

"You have to take the time to work with young people, and you have to believe it is something important for you to do," said Brooks. "They are all going to school together, and see each other socially, but they have to understand that once you are in the real world of work and fighting for scarce resources, some of the things you don't normally think about begin to come out."

The goal of the program works to engage youth in business practices during the early stages of their development, in order to train future business leaders through various programs, which provide minority youth, ages 14-21, with valuable tools to start a profitable and sustainable business.

Last month, the association held their annual summer Youth Academy and conference, which is an all day event focusing on the different ways youth can be successful in their own personal business endeavors.

Through group business activities, public speakers, and videos demonstrating innovative young entrepreneurs, those who attended the event were given an array of learning opportunities, including leadership, teamwork and social skills, education of economic development both locally and globally, and opportunities for youth business de-

velopment.

Brooks said a variety of Portland companies, including the Trail Blazers and several bankers, attended to talk to these young people about how to be successful. "At the conference, they also put together a business plan and compete in groups of five or six, and they are awarded with real money," he said. "We give everyone something."

Although the conference takes place only once a year, youth residents can participate throughout the year to gain experience with business, including a Youth Entrepreneurial Store program (YES), which teaches participants how to design, market, carry out inventory, and manage a retail store.

"Sometimes we also bring them into business meetings so they can see adults running companies," he said. "They never really know what these people do, so we bring them in so they can see them in action."

Brooks said, however, the biggest lesson the youth are taught, which can be heard at any one of their meetings, is "no discrimination is acceptable."

"It is not just about African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, European Americans," he said. "Everybody is in. Nobody is out."

"If you start out by saying no amount of discrimination is okay, then everybody is on that page," said Brooks. "You have to keep working on that with young people."

Brooks said any young person who wants to participate can become involved, and every ethnic group is encouraged to participate.

Brooks said because it is so difficult with the current lack of jobs, youth must be encouraged and be given the space to continue their education. "We provide them with an opportunity to learn so they will be competitive in the future," he said. "And you have to be convinced that when you do all of this, there will be something valuable at the end of the road."

"Real racism and discrimination exist in the world, and we need to move away from that" he said. "We need to remind young people they can be successful."

For more information about OAME and their Youth Program visit www.oame.org or call 503-249-7744.

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