



DIALOGUE ON DIVERSITY

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Contact: Clarissa Mendez: 703-

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DIALOGUE ON DIVERSITY AT NATIONAL PRESS CLUB: FIFTEENTH ANNUAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP/IT CONFERENCE

Returning to its National Press Club site in Washington after presentations in New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago, Dialogue on Diversity's 2008 Entrepreneurship/IT Conference brought to a capacity audience such featured speakers as D.C. Congressional **Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton** and U.S. Treasurer **Anna Escobedo Cabral**, a parade of top supplier diversity executives from both private- and public-sector purchasing offices, and three panels of women entrepreneurs recounting their recipes for success with IT savvy, first rank management skills, and more than a dash of indomitable spirit. Conference guests were greeted by **Karen I. Campbell**, Vice President for Policy of Verizon Washington, program sponsor, who conveyed the company's pleasure in supporting the Dialogue's entrepreneurship programs. It is a part of Verizon's mission, Ms. Campbell noted, not only to operate its business, but at once to improve the community in which it acts. In such a program as the present one, there is an earnest and serious exchange of ideas; and a resolving of issues is the aim, as the entrepreneurs of the group gathering at the Press Club find a time and a setting for networking, a sharing of goals and insights.

"Dialogue on Diversity", notes its President, **Ma. Cristina Caballero**, "prides itself on bringing to our audience of women entrepreneurs, those of many ethnic and cultural traditions, a roster of star quality women achievers, each with a successful enterprise story. The women's and ethnic enterprise sector is the focal point of growth and innovation in the national economic picture, and it is our task to display and celebrate these achievements. Our Dialogue, after all, is basically a network -- reaching across the country and through Latin America as well -- of women entrepreneurs dedicated to much more than mere viability -- through our continuing constructive dialogue we are aiming for excellence, at high achievement in economics and in a forward-looking civic consciousness! And alongside the forward momentum that newcomers in a society always have, there is the fact that an aggressive adoption of innovative technology will add significant impetus to the already impressive effects of women's entrepreneurial effort."

Other Conference highlights were the presentation at the Midday session of the Dialogue's Leadership Award in special recognition of **Del. Ana Sol Gutierrez**, dean of Latino leadership in the Washington region, now a member the Maryland House of Delegates. A second Leadership Award was conferred on **Sonia Gutierrez**, the charismatic founder and head of the Carlos Rosario Charter School, the nationally renowned model adult education institute that has taken shape in Northwest Washington under her leadership. Both honorees stressed in their remarks the invigorating effects on the larger society of the fresh energies and spirit of the newcomers, many of them immigrants from Latin America, but also from countries of Africa and Asia. **Susan Gonzalez** of Comcast concluded the midday session with a concise outline of the impending switchover from analog to digital television transmission -- and how cable and other technological fixes permit the home viewer to cope with the newly enriched visual experience that awaits in early 2009.

But the dominant message in the 2008 Conference was the prospect for small enterprises of tapping into the immense purchasing stream flowing from America's corporate purchasing giants and also from the formidable array of federal agencies. The techniques women and ethnic entrepreneurs can bring to bear in readying themselves to compete in the stiff rivalry for the purchasing dollars, the process of gaining the coveted qualified rating from private- and public-sector organizations as

the admission ticket to the competition, and the resourcefulness that enables fast turn-around times and innovative techniques as the owner's stock in trade – all this was the subject of seminars occupying the whole of the morning session. Among speakers were **Kenneth Clark**, head of the MD/DC Minority Supplier Development Council, **Theresa Alvillar Speake**, Director of the Department of Energy's supplier diversity effort, and **Denise Rodriguez**, holding a similar post at DOT. **Antonio Monroig** of a Washington law firm, a long-time friend of the Ana G. Mendez University System of San Juan, Puerto Rico, outlines that academic body's performance in the supplier diversity field, while **John Marshall** of Verizon brought the perspective of the large, socially conscious firm of the private sector. In an interactive seminar on supplier diversity techniques. **Lourdes F. Diaz** of Sodexo and **Charlie Partridge** of PEPCO Holdings shared their wide ranging supplier diversity expertise as they fielded queries from attending entrepreneurs.

In a Diversity Roundtable women excelling in both business and civic fields offered an in-depth exploration of the diversity of culture in contemporary economic and social life. **Kimberly Kuo** of MyWireless related the policy background of the wireless industry, an arena in which engineering savvy and the ubiquitous regulatory impulse vie for the dominant role in shaping this growing and pervasively important industry. **Carmen Ramos** of QMRI, and **Zainab al-Suwaij**, Director of the American Islamic Congress, and **Allegra McCullough**, management consultant and former SBA executive, reviewed the often starkly distinct, but at once surprisingly familiar, motivations and challenges faced by women in Washington's disadvantaged neighborhoods, Fairfax's affluent redoubts, and the often harsh world of the Middle East.

Program segments on wireless and other innovative information/communications technology, on both the hardware and software fronts, along with HD innovations, brought home to Conference attendees the key role of this new, technology-laden regime in the workings of the contemporary enterprises. **Lynette Spano**, whose parents came from Cuba and Puerto Rico, recounted her IT firm's founding a score of years ago, when, just out of high school, she set up shop with quarters in the basement of her family home in Brooklyn -- its offices now are found in a suburban Washington high rise, with branches in nineteen U.S. cities. **Karla Gonzalez**, an arrival from El Salvador at the age of eighteen, set about building her own IT firm, which today is a closely knit partnership of expert IT professionals and a loyal network of client firms throughout the metropolitan region. Saran Baker of Verizon reviewed her work as IT guru for a network of companies, small and large, in her bailiwick in the Mid-Atlantic states.

fill the remainder of the day's crowded schedule -- along with much needed instruction on the vital springs of capital access, the arcane arts of financial management, and sound business organization techniques.

1629 K Street, N.W., Suite 300 Washington, D.C. 20006

Tel: [FfxVa] 703-631-0650, Fax: [FfxVa] 703- 631-0617 dialog.div@prodigy.net www.dialogcondiversity.org

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