

SBA names Minnesota Minority Small Business Champion

Written by
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Sharon B. Banks, Senior Project Manager at the University of Minnesota, has been named the Minnesota Minority Small Business Champion of the Year by the U.S. Small Business Administration.

The Minority Small Business Champion award is presented annually in each state to individuals who assist small businesses through outstanding advocacy efforts on behalf of minority-owned small businesses. Yvonne Cheung Ho, President and CEO of MEDA, nominated Banks for this award.

Banks, a native of Pittsburgh, has lived in the Twin Cities since moving from Atlanta in 1979. She describes herself as a "problem solver" and considers her organizational and interpersonal skills her greatest assets. As Senior Project Manager in the University of Minnesota's Office for Business and Community Economic Development, she is responsible for the inclusion of women, minorities and person with disabilities on University construction projects. Prior to joining the University, she was Manager of Career Development and Diversity at Northwest Airlines.

At the University, she collaborated with Construction Project Management representatives to implement a process to analyze construction closeout reports and confirm contractor compliance to University targeted inclusion goals. This process of compliance resulted in an increase of 23.7% inclusion of Women, Minorities and Disabled Persons (WMDBE) firms receiving contracts at the University of Minnesota.

Banks was the Senior Project Manager for the TCF Gopher Football Stadium responsible for WMDBE inclusion. Under Banks' supervision, the General Contractor exceeded all of the project goals. The WMDBE project goal for the stadium was 22%; actual participation achieved was 30%. Workforce utilization was set at 29%; actual workforce levels achieved were 34%.

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The female goal was 4%, with actual achievement of 6%.

Banks' interest in supporting small businesses and minorities extends beyond her work life into her personal life. She participated on the Richfield Community Council which was convened by the Mayor to strategize how to advance minority small business interests within Richfield. As a member of this council, she provided information measurement tools to identify weaknesses in the business community of Richfield. Utilizing her prior experience as Manager of Diversity at Northwest Airlines, Banks provided information to embrace the increasing diversity in Richfield. The committee presented a letter of recommendation to focus on diversity initiatives designed to improve relationships in the business community and in the school system.

Banks has served as Chairperson for the Minnesota Minority Supplier Development Council, Board of Directors of the National Association of Minority Contractors, Southern University Youth Motivation Task Force, NAACP Career Counseling Board for Personal and Professional Development and the Wallin Foundation High School Mentor Program at North High School in Minneapolis.

Banks earned a B.S. in Business Management from Cardinal Stritch University and a M.A. in Public Affairs with a concentration in Economic Development from the University of Minnesota. She is a graduate of Mentium 100 and a lifetime member of the National Black MBA Association. She lives in Richfield with her husband Clifford and son Cristian.