

M/WBE fiscal outlook good, but political storm clouds gathering

By BRIDGET EVARTS
The Chronicle Staff Writer

The city of Winston-Salem awarded minority and women contractors 10.31 percent of all construction and demolition contracts this year, an increase of more than 5 percent from last year. However, the total number of Minority/Women Business Enterprise (M/WBE) firms providing professional services to the city this year dropped 42 percent.

"That's disturbing, considering everything we've put in to try to increase awareness of these firms," said Derwick Paige, M/WBE coordinator.

There are four categories under which the M/WBE office tracks spending: materials and services, construction and demolition, discretionary spending and subcontract activity. Professional services, such as engineering firms and consultants, fall under the discretionary spending category, which is spending by a department under \$100,000 and thus does not require a formal bid.

This past year, only one minority and one woman-owned firm were contracted under the discretionary spending category. Paige said that the overall number of minority and women contractors in business may have decreased since last year, and next year his department will specifically identify professional services contractors by category.

The dramatic increase in construction and demolition spending, which showed a 128 percent rise from the 1995-96 fiscal year, was attributed to a \$1.8 million contract awarded to a woman-owned business.

The city spent about \$4 million less overall on materials and services, so the total amount awarded to minority and women businesses in this category dropped. However, the number of contracts awarded to M/WBE firms actually rose by .02 percent.

City subcontracting decreased overall, from over \$44 million last year to under \$19 million this year. M/WBE subcontracting amounts also dropped

about \$1 million. However, the percentage of awards to those firms rose drastically, from 8.6 percent in 1995-96 to 15.42 in 1996-97.

Paige commended the M/WBE Advisory Committee for the improvements in the city's program, but warned the group to watch affirmative action debates on the national level.

Congress introduced a proposal to end affirmative action programs, including M/WBE programs, this past year. The proposal didn't make it out of committee, but the trend away from affirmative action continues. Motions similar to California's Proposition 209, which did away with race and gender considerations in state jobs or schools, have been introduced in North Carolina's General Assembly on several occasions.

Winston-Salem's M/WBE program does not require quotas or set-asides for minority and women business involvement in city contracts. Instead, it sets voluntary goals encouraging contrac-



Derrick Paige

up these letters with further communication and advertising bids in a widely-read minority publication.

Still, those efforts seem excessive to affirmative action opponents. And sentiment on the federal level will most definitely affect the local, said Paige.

Another immediate cause for concern was the lack of minority and women participation in rehabilitation projects. These projects, which usually bid under \$20,000, often serve as a foot in the door for new businesses.

"It's kind of an incubator," said Advisory Committee member Burley Strader. "It'd be good to find out if there is something we can do to help people get into that market."

The M/WBE office sponsors Section 3 classes for minorities and women interested in starting a business.

The 10-week program, which began on Tuesday, teaches potential M/WBE participants skills such as bidding and estimating and setting up a business plan.

tors to solicit minority and women subcontractors.

Contractors are supposed to prove that they made a good faith effort to contract minority and women-owned firms. Some of these efforts include supplying written notice of a bid to a reasonable number of M/WBEs, following

Dr. Otis Moss to start WSSU lecture series Community service, volunteerism forum set

Nationally renowned religious leader and community activist Dr. Otis Moss Jr. is the first in a series of thought provoking speakers to keynote the James A. Gray Religion and Ethics lecture series, which is in its sixth year.

The year-long series begins Thursday, Oct. 9, in Dillard Auditorium at the Albert H. Anderson Center at 9:45 a.m.

Moss is pastor of Olivet Institutional Baptist Church in Cleveland, Ohio. He brings more than 30 years of direct involvement in the civil rights movement in both his roles as a minister and a community activist.

He has co-pastored Ebenezer

Baptist Church with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. He has made his position clear over the years on the use of the nonviolent approach for affecting social and political change.

Moss consulted with President Carter on moral and social issues facing the country. He was invited to the signing of the peace treaty between Israel and Jordan in 1994 by President Clinton. He currently serves on the Board of Directors for the Morehouse School of Religion and the Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Non-Violent Social Change. He has also been recognized by Ebony Magazine as one of this country's greatest African-American ministers.



Moss

Citizens residing in Forsyth, Davidson, Yadkin, Surry, and Stokes Counties are invited to a public forum on community service and volunteerism, 5:30-7 p.m. on either Oct. 7 or Oct. 9 at the American Red Cross in Winston-Salem. The forums are hosted by the North Carolina Commission for National and Community Service, the North Carolina State Office of the Corporation for National Service and the Office of Public Instruction, and the United Way of Forsyth

County.

Similar forums are taking place across the state during the next few weeks.

These forums will result in a state plan for increasing collaboration and helping define the framework through which community service and volunteerism will improve the quality of life in North Carolina. In addition, they will help provide the groundwork for the upcoming Governor's Summit on Volunteerism.

Mari Jo Winkle from the Association for the Benefit of

Child Development and president-elect of the North Carolina Association of Volunteer Administration said that these forums "are pivotal in assuring that input is received from the grassroots level so that the Governor's Summit will produce the results needed to have a direct impact in our community."

To RSVP call LaShawnda Henderson at United Way of Forsyth County, at 721-9344. All interested residents are encouraged to attend the forums.

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