

An Event to Remember

The Historically Underutilized Business (HUB) Conference hosted by the Hampton Roads Chapter held November 6th and 7th in Virginia Beachm Virginia was a huge success. If you were not there you truly missed a phenomenal event. With the forthcoming of multi-billion dollar major transportation and transportation-related projects across the Commonwealth of Virginia, this was an opportunity for COMTO Hampton Roads to support not only these initiatives, but become a vehicle in fostering partnerships among large and small businesses based both in and outside of Virginia. With the theme “*Building Capacity from the Outside In,*” led by chapter President Prescott Sherrod and Program Committee Chair; Delceno Miles this two day event did just that.

Setting the stage with a welcome reception on Thursday evening, sponsored by the Virginia Beach Convention Center & Visitors Bureau, was undoubtedly a great opportunity to network and socialize with leaders and decision makers both locally and nationally. The evening included live jazz, an array delicacies, and a multitude of special guests and dignitaries. Some of those in attendance were Shirley A. DeLibero, COMTO National Chair; Julie Cunningham, COMTO President & CEO; Al Brunson, COMTO HUB Advisor; Senator Yvonne B. Miller, Chair, VA Senate Transportation Committee; Florida State Senator Kenneth Hill; Virginia Beach City Councilman Ron Villanueva; Suffolk City Councilman Charles Brown; Norfolk City Councilman Randy Wright; Jim Ricketts, Director of Va. Beach Conventions Bureau; William Jones, Director of Finance, Norfolk International Airport; and Eldridge Coles, GRTC Chief Operating Officer.

Day two, not to be outdone by the day before, proved to be extremely impactful. The agenda included a series of workshops as well as a power luncheon designed to assist over 120 attendees representing a diverse mode of transportation industries from Philadelphia, St. Louis, Washington D.C., Maryland, Boston, Florida, Denver, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Illinois in obtaining access to opportunities as well as gaining those skills necessary to be more competitive in the contractual arena. The intimate setting not only created an environment for in-depth panel discussions, it was the catalyst for a healthy exchange of information and ideas needed to move HUBs forward. Highlights of the day included information from both transportation and transportation-related entities. Nancy Strine, USDOT, Office of Small & Disadvantaged Business Utilization, presented available loan options for DBE prime and subcontractors as well as those financial partnerships in place for long term support. Jason Cosby, Director of Public Works, City of Virginia Beach introduced the city’s aggressive efforts to seek HUB firms in its growth initiative. With over \$1.1 billion dollars in active projects and a \$5.1 million dollar contract recently awarded to a HUB, the city is extremely serious about expanding participation. Sharon Foster, Compliance Officer, Hampton Roads Transit, spoke to the needs of Norfolk’s Light Rail and its \$200+ million dollar project value. J.J. (Jeff) Keever, Deputy Executive Director, Virginia Port Authority shared the vision of the Craney Island Expansion Terminal, its \$2.4 billion dollars in available contracts, and the title of being deemed the number one port on the east coast at completion. Grindly Johnson, VDOT, informed attendees about the states progressive initiatives to further engage HUB’s, VDOT’s \$5.4 billion dollar highway improvement Mega-projects currently underway in Northern Virginia and its

desire for continued growth in HUB involvement. Carmelia Ravenbakht, Deputy Executive Director, Hampton Roads Planning District Council shared not only the transportation-related research findings of the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), but several needed infrastructure improvement projects totaling approximately \$9 billion dollars. The MPO presentation was of particular importance given the President Elect Barack Obama's plans to improve infrastructure. Lastly, Virginia Beach's regional airports (Norfolk International, and Newport News/ Williamsburg International) collectively identified over \$100 million dollars in projects set to be completed over the next several years.

To put it mildly, in Virginia opportunities for HUBs is available, and the Hampton Roads chapter of COMTO is quickly positioning itself to serve as a resource to connect those opportunities to qualified HUBs who have the capacity and past performance to successfully execute these projects. The goal is to not only provide training and mentoring opportunities for HUBs, but to become a conduit in fostering business development opportunities.

The luncheon keynote speaker, Virginia Secretary of Transportation Pierce Homer's presentation included a valuable question and answer period with surprisingly candid responses regarding the agency's reputation in different regions of the state and the importance of global thinking especially for small businesses. Secretary Homer talked about budgets shortfalls and the use of "toll projects" as a means for cost sharing reimbursements via public-private partnerships or the PPTA model of doing business on large infrastructure projects within the Commonwealth.

Other notable panelist and guest speakers for the day included Shirley A. DeLibero, National Chair, COMTO Board of Directors; National COMTO President & CEO Julie Cunningham; Al Brunson, Chair, COMTO National HUB Advisory Council; U.S. Congresswoman Thelma Drake; Norfolk Councilman Randy Wright; James Toscano, Vice President of Public Affairs and Communications, Hampton Roads Transit; Lynda Sharp Anderson, Director, Virginia Department of Business Assistance; Samuel Hayes, Director, Virginia Department of Minority Business Enterprise; Tammy Owens, Minority Business Development Manager, Virginia Beach Department of Economic Development; James Carroll, Director Small Business Development Center of Hampton Roads, Inc.; Dr. Robert E. Martinez, Vice President Business Development Norfolk Southern Corporation; Louisa Strayhorn, President of LSA Consulting; Moges Ayele, Ph.D., Federal Highway Administration; and Don Goldberg, President, D,D. Jones Transfer and Warehouse Company.

In an effort to carry through with the building capacity theme the closing included a wind down reception hosted by the Westin Virginia Beach Town Center where guests again had a chance to build on those professional relationships that had been culminated over the two day period.

This HUB conference provided access and forward thinking information that fleshed out growth strategies and opportunities now and for the future for HUB firms in what promises to be a tough but dynamically environment. The added value of this conference was the level of the presenters and the local, regional and national mix of multi-modal transportation participants.

As echoed by all, this is the beginning of great things to come; for both those in attendance, as well as, the Hampton Roads Chapter, which will serve as host of COMTO National Meeting and

Training Conference for 2010 and 2013. The Hampton Roads Chapter is truly excited about the possibilities.