The St. Louis region’s robust economy drew hundreds of people to St. Louis Lambert International Airport (STL) on April 26th for the Business Diversity Forum. It was an occasion for small and large businesses to discuss opportunities on major development projects at the Airport and throughout the region. STL’s Business Diversity Development (BDD) Department presented the Forum. The BDD office certifies minority and women-owned businesses for the City of St. Louis’ local...
Minority and Women Business Enterprise (M/WBE) Programs as well as STL’s federal Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) Program.

The region’s leader in economic development, Otis Williams delivered the keynote address. Williams is the Executive Director for the St. Louis Development Corporation (SLDC). He highlighted contract opportunities for the $1.7 billion National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency’s new western headquarters in north St. Louis. “The NGA is one of the major transformational opportunities for the City,” Williams told attendees. Construction is expected to begin early next year, peaking in 2022 with as many as 1,300 construction workers at the site and completion in 2025.

Williams presented a long list of new development projects from Ball Park Village to Union Station, BJC, St. Louis University Hospital and beyond. Williams delighted in sharing news that several boutique hotels chains are coming to the City featuring roof top entertainment themes.

More announcements are on the horizon for plans to revitalize the old YMCA building on 15th and Locus Street, the Municipal Courts building on Market Street, the Jefferson Arms building on Tucker, and the VA Hospital. Williams sighted a recent news report that estimates $8 billion in completed or new construction in the region.
Williams said he could not mention all the new development projects without discussing participation for minority and women business owners. “SLDC has new technology to monitor the number of minority and women-owned businesses participating on development projects. MBE participation is around 27.8 percent and WBE is 6.5 percent participation,” he said. Those percentages are above the City’s participation goals for 25 percent MBE and 5 percent WBE.

Airport representatives presented attendees with information on its multi-million-dollar redevelopment and expansion project for the Terminal 2 baggage claim area.

The project is currently in the design phase, but construction is right around the corner according Jeff Lea, STL Public Relations Manager. “The area will expand by 10 thousand square feet, with 3 new carousels, an additional conveyor belt system, new luggage loading zones, all to improve the delivery time for baggage to passengers,” he said. Over 60 percent of STL passengers use Terminal 2 on Southwest Airlines, the Airport’s largest air carrier.
The Forum also featured a networking breakfast, roundtable discussions on development projects for St. Louis County, the Missouri Department of Transportation, the Metropolitan St. Louis Sewer District, Bi-State Development and the Small Business Administration.

The half-day Forum wrapped up with an exhibit hall featuring 60 exhibitors such as Aschinger Electric, KAI Design Build, Kozeny Wagner Construction all on hand to make important connections with attendees.

Other Highlights from the 2019 Business Diversity Forum

Over half the participants were first-time attendees. Antonio Strong, Airport Deputy Director of Finance and Administration welcomed them and issued a challenge to meet five people who could help advance their business. The first-time attendees entered a drawing for a special prize. The lucky winner is Kelly Schneider, Manager of Procurement Support at Bi-State Development Agency.