A record crowd of 450 attended the 3rd Annual Business Diversity Forum on March 31 presented by St. Louis Lambert International Airport. The theme for the half-day event was "Connecting Diversity to New Heights," and attendees did just that. The Forum offered participants two roundtable discussions, increased time for networking, and a keynote speaker highlighting national business opportunities in the aviation industry. Awards were presented to several companies for their diversity performance.
The Forum was held in the Concourse B event space of Terminal 1. The atmosphere was abuzz as minority and women business owners used the opening networking breakfast to connect with prime contractors and key airport decision makers. In welcoming remarks, Amber D. Gooding, Assistant Director of Community Programs and Business Diversity Development, noted the air of excitement in the room. “Your presence here this morning tells us that you are ready to make connections and learn about resources that will help your business soar,” she said.

The Airport is excelling in diversity achievements. Gooding pointed out that St. Louis Lambert recently received the St. Louis Council of Construction Consumers’ “2017 Inclusion Advocacy Award for Organizational Excellence for Inclusion.” The just-released Business Diversity Development (BDD) 2015-16 Annual Report documents this progress. The statistics tell the success story of a dramatic increase in the number of companies approved for certification and a decrease in the number of days needed to process a certification application. Participation of minority-owned, women-owned, and disadvantaged business enterprises in Airport contracts is on the rise.

Rhonda Hamm-Niebruegge, Director of St. Louis Lambert International Airport

Rhonda Hamm-Niebruegge, Director of St. Louis Lambert International Airport, reported that 2016 was an unbelievable year for the Airport, with a 10 percent increase in passenger traffic. She noted that 1.2 million more passengers traveled through the airport last year, “What that means is more people are buying, more people are eating, and we have to construct more venues and that will create more opportunities.” Hamm-Niebruegge announced improvements for later this year to Terminal 2 including four new gates, a new private lounge, a new local concept restaurant, and a new Starbucks. This will mean even more potential contracts for minority- and women-owned businesses.
**Soaring Aviation Industry Provides National Business Opportunities**

The local growth trends are a reflection of how the aviation industry is growing nationally. Keynote speaker Krystal J. Brumfield, president and chief executive officer of the Airport Minority Advisory Council (AMAC), focused on national opportunities for women and minority-owned businesses. She praised the efforts of the Airport and the BDD office in setting the tone for many airports that are growing and for their commitment to diversity.

Brumfield noted airport development needs nationally are estimated at 70 billion dollars. She cited multi-year expansion projects at airports in the cities of Nashville, New York, Seattle, Atlanta, and Washington, D.C. "There are contract opportunities for new retail, concessions, engineering and design, cargo expansion, facility maintenance, parking structures, terminal modernization, hotels and mixed-use development," Brumfield said.

With billions of dollars in projects planned nationally, Brumfield urged participants to connect with decision makers at these airports by attending AMAC's Annual Business Diversity Conference, June 16-20 in Houston. "This is an opportunity to help advance your business in aviation, receive updates on regulatory compliance, and new revenue streams, and network with over 1,000 minority- and women-owned businesses."

Following Brumfield's keynote address, the BDD presented awards to several companies for their on-time delivery of services to the Airport and for their contribution to business diversity.
2017 Business Diversity Award Winners

Construction
Tony Thompson, CEO, Kwame Building Group, Inc.
Margaret McGrath, President, Tramar Contracting, Inc.

Professional Services
Karl Grice, Owner, Grice Group Architects

Airport Services
Charles L. Brown, Owner, Regency Enterprises Services, LLC.

Diversity Champions

A new award, Diversity Champion, was created last year to recognize individuals who have demonstrated an ongoing commitment to diversity in their business and the community. These individuals are honored for their career achievements, volunteer work, and efforts to develop opportunities for this generation and the next.
Yaphett El-Amin
Executive Director, MOKAN, the St. Louis Construction Contractors Assistance Center. Over 1,000 participants have graduated from the Center's apprenticeship educational program.

Ron Unterreiner
Founder of PEOPLE, a group that connects minority firms with prime contractors the construction industry and former Vice President, Rhodey Construction, Inc.

The Forum culminated with two sessions of roundtable discussions covering more than 20 topics ranging from "How to Market Your Business as a M/WBE" to "Obtaining Federal Government Contracts Through the 8(a) Program." Many light bulb moments occurred as participants gleaned tips and insights from industry experts. There was also expanded time for informal networking and visiting the exhibition hall.