

Young Entrepreneurs Conference Stimulates Youth to do for Self

by Eric Henderson

Scores of young African American entrepreneurs and prospective business leaders gathered at the Cornucopia on Parkside Avenue in West Philadelphia Saturday to learn how to become more successful in their business ventures and the avenues that will carry them along that profitable route.

The scene was the young Urban Entrepreneur Conference, sponsored by the West Philadelphia Economic Development Corporation (WPEDC) and co-hosted by Parkside Association of Philadelphia, Wharton West Philadelphia Project (a young entrepreneur initiative), Philadelphia Commercial Development Corporation (PCDC) and Parents Against Drugs.

The theme of the all-day session, which attracted vendors and exhibitors, was "Vision 2000".

"We need our young urban Blacks to take control of their destiny," said Dr. Jerome Mitchell, executive director of WPEDC. "This conference, hopefully, will provide greater insight into the challenges ahead and help them focus on the resources and options that will make better use of their expertise and energies."

"The fact that they are being exposed to something of this nature at an early stage in their careers, and seeing successful role models has to be a plus."

"The point we're making here with our youth is that we need to be owning our businesses and controlling our destiny by the year 2000," Mitchell continued. "We make it clear to them that they can use their natural talents in becoming a success, and not depending on just a job that often will not use those talents."

The participants, representing a broad range of business interests, attended workshops addressing the importance of business counselling and utilizing maximum business resources, the range and types of financing sources, on the opportunities in the music industry, on first-hand experiences of local business owners.

They were also introduced to the types of entrepreneur programs available.

One workshop, geared to infuse youngsters with a better sense of ownership mentality, focused on Black History and the success many Blacks enjoyed as founders and heads of their respective firms.

Many of the workshop leaders focused on rap music and videos as keys to reaching young black entrepreneurs and their targeted markets.

"If you want to be successful in reaching young people, rap and video are the primary vehicles," said Mike Elliot, formerly of the Krush Rap group. "You cannot ignore this. Young people are into rap and they are into videos and it makes much sense to use that medium."

Elliot and Tyraine Ragsdale, president of GRANDHANK, headed an enthusiastic afternoon session entitled "Rap as a Business".

Another highly motivating session was delivered by Ivan J. Juzang, founder and president of Motivational Educational Entertainment (MEE) Inc., a research, consulting and video production company whose mission is to "define the American dream in urban terms" through highly motivating, entertaining videos.

Juzang's 12-minute demonstration video, "The Flava Attitude", unveiled last March during a press conference at the University of Pennsylvania, incorporates rap music, role models and culturally oriented art and images.

"People ask me why our approach will work," Juzang said. "I tell them urban youth laugh at the current attempts to reach them. We are the first to exclusively focus on their world as defined and determined by them. Our urban teens are growing up in a world that is becoming increasingly violent, without role models or motivation. These videos will deliver positive messages to these kids."

MEE's concept has been endorsed by some of the nation's top educators, including Dr. Houston A. Baker, Jr., director of the Center for the Study of Black Literature and Culture at the University of Pennsylvania.

Surran Cassile, owner of the First Decision Hair Salon; Joel Wilson, owner of D.C. Tees, Russell Brown, distributor for the Rebba W. Brown Marketing Group were panelists in the workshop, "How To Be Successful".

Keith Collins, director of Primerica Financial Services, headed a session on "Business Counselling."

"It's been very informative and entertaining," said a 14-year-old female student who launched her business venture earlier this year, "I like the idea of owning your own business."

"The conference has offered an opportunity to network, to learn what others are doing and how to go about getting the necessary resources," said David Bey, who has ventured into the export/import business. "We need more workshops like these."