



## MDC's Office of Diversity: Promoting Success Within Our Communities

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**The Metropolitan District (MDC) exists** to provide the Hartford region with safe, pure drinking water, environmentally protective wastewater collection and treatment, and other services that benefit the member towns. Since its creation 80 years ago, the District has had to continually evolve to meet the changing needs of the region, and part of that evolution has meant actively creating opportunities on its construction projects for the diverse population that comprises the area which they serve. That's where the good work of MDC's Office of Diversity, and its director, Mike Jefferson, come into play.

Under Mike's leadership, MDC's Office of Diversity has effectively developed programs aimed at enhancing the business and construction skills of small, disadvantaged, minority-, and women-owned businesses as they seek and perform work on MDC projects and beyond. In 2010 and 2011, MDC, AGC of Connecticut, and the Business Resource Center (BRC) partnered up to produce a series of training programs, based on AGC of America's Supervisory Training (STP) program, which trained over 30 owners and employees of MBE/WBE firms in key areas such as contract administration, estimating and job costing, planning and scheduling, and risk management. The MDC saw the need for such a program within the community and the contractors with whom it works, and committed the resources to make it happen.

MDC also offers on-the-job training to provide local youth access to meaningful, immediate employment and training opportunities with firms in the Hartford area. Through this training, they gain the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in the utility construction industry while earning a paycheck and acquiring the proper certifications. The employer partners also play an integral role

by providing real-world exposure to active construction worksites and field offices.

Most recently, MDC has teamed with the University of Hartford's Entrepreneurial Center to deliver small business training programs under the Small Contractor Development Program. Shelli McMillen of the Entrepreneurial Center manages the program which identifies the challenges small contractors face and focuses intense training and technical assistance in those areas. Some of the services they offer through this program include matchmaking, technical assistance, access to financing, banking, insurance, and on-the-job training.

The program has hosted business card exchanges at MDC's pre-bid conferences for some of the contracts under their Clean Water Program. It has also sponsored an Executive Leadership Academy to help minority- and women-owned small businesses market their products and services to large contractors. Last year's Leadership Academy featured a session on contract financing, a bonding clinic, and a lecture series at which CCIA President Don Shubert, Jonathan Miller, president of C.H. Nickerson & Company, Inc., and Jim Manafort, president of Manafort Brothers, Inc. all spoke on what small contractors and suppliers should expect on construction projects.

The partnership between MDC and the Entrepreneurial Center has produced a number of success stories, one of which is the example of Reynolds Welding and Fabrication of Hartford. Owners Jerardo and Joyce Reynolds were connected to the Center by the MDC. Through the efforts of the MDC's Supplier Diversity Office and the Entrepreneurial Center, the Reynolds received in-depth training and technical assistance which resulted in a contract award to provide structural steel for the MDC Garage in Hartford. Joyce Reynolds remarked in an article on the Entrepreneurial Center's website, "What I think I liked the best was the detailed personal attention we got from our Entrepreneurial Center business counselor, Lacey Banks. The Entrepreneurial Center certainly offers great service. I just hope they never quit."

The success of MDC's and the Entrepreneurial Center's partnership was recognized recently when Mike and Shelli were honored as finalists in the Educator of the Year category at the 2015 AGC of Connecticut Industry Recognition Awards program for their collaboration on the MDC Small Contractor Development Program. One of those individuals who nominated them for this prestigious award summed her feelings about the program this way: "... This program has had a significant impact on my company and on others in the construction industry. Many of their classes are taught by industry leaders, making industry connections available to me that would normally be very difficult, if not impossible."