

ICABA helps local black business leaders build relationships

BY LESLIE KRAFT BURKE

South Florida's black business leaders are not only an untapped resource for many local companies and civic groups in general, but also among themselves. Jerome Hutchinson Jr. hopes to change that.



Hutchinson

He and his late wife Pam Hutchinson created ICABA (Identify, Connect, Activate the Black Accomplished) in 2008 to build business relationships with more lasting connections than typical social networking. The 1,500-member group's mission is to provide a way to make meaningful connections among accomplished blacks throughout South Florida. Eventually, Hutchinson says, he would like to take the group global.

ICABA combines online profiles and participation, event attendance and directories listing detailed information about black professionals. The goal is to help companies connect with an unfamiliar but desirable population, Hutchinson says.

When the Hutchinsons moved to Weston from Houston in 2005, they found it difficult to locate information about local black professionals, like themselves, and where they might meet them. Pam was a private client banker and Jerome was in radio.

"In other places we lived, it was easier to find networking opportunities within the black professional community," Hutchinson said. "But here, there are no places they frequent as a group - no favorite gathering places, such as restaurants, private clubs or country clubs. Black entrepreneurs also are just beginning to emerge here, whereas in other places, their presence is larger."

Pam Hutchinson got to know members of the black community here when she published the Who's Who in Black South Florida directory. Since then, ICABA, which has three full-time employees, has published the directory of South Florida's 100 Most Accomplished Blacks in Healthcare and Law, and will soon publish the local 100 Most Accomplished Black Corporate Executives, Professionals and Academics, the 100 Most Accomplished Blacks in Sports, Media, Celebrity and Arts and Culture, the 100 Most Accomplished Black Entrepreneurs, and the 100 Black Leading First Ladies of Worship.

The directories' publications, which Hutchinson expects to be on a two-year cycle, are celebrated with launch events. About 700 members and guests attended the most recent ICABA Honors event at Nova Southeastern University in November. Sponsors included NSU, Becker & Poliakoff, the Broward Alliance, Macy's, Greenspoon Marder, Haliczzer Pettis & Schwamm, In Touch Logistic Services, the Broward Center for the Performing Arts, the Greater Fort Lauderdale Convention & Visitors Bureau and the *South Florida Business Journal*.

CONNECTING TO ONE ANOTHER

ICABA's directories; online member profiles, articles and contact capabilities; and networking events help blacks connect to each other as much as they do to companies and other groups within the local community. Membership is free upon acceptance of professional credentials, but some events have a charge and directories are \$29.95 each.

South Florida's black professionals face the



PHOTOS BY MARK FREERKS

Bessie Fletcher, above, Tunde Ogunlana, below left, and Bernard Lee, below right, say ICABA has helped them secure business contacts.



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challenge of cultural splintering as they seek to network, Hutchinson said. "Unlike in areas like Atlanta, Houston or Chicago, the black population in South Florida does not derive its identity from being American black. They have cultural affiliations, such as their Caribbean or Latin American background, that they identify with more closely and so they often interact within those groups."

Like entrepreneurs in general, "a lot of successful black entrepreneurs only live here part time and don't get involved in the mainstream of the local community," he said.

As a board member of the Broward Alliance, Hutchinson is trying to encourage more black businesses to move into the region, and he also hopes to work along those lines with Miami-Dade County's Beacon Council and the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce.

He is already responsible for at least one business opening a Boca Raton location within the past two years.

Chauncy Mayfield, the founder, president and CEO of Mayfield Gentry Realty Advisors LLC in Detroit, opened a South Florida office for his second business, Portfolio Property Management Global LLC, which now employs seven here and 54 in Michigan.

"Jerome brought together business leaders and held a reception for me here when I was considering the area," Mayfield said. "Through my association with him, I was able to meet professionals and develop legacy relationships that meant long-term business."

Mayfield Gentry is on the *Black Enterprise* magazine's B.E. 100 list as a top-five African American-owned U.S. private equity firm, while PPM Global is the largest African-American-owned property management firm in the U.S.

Mayfield credits his involvement with ICABA for helping meet key contacts at the University of Miami and being a catalyst for hiring the Becker & Poliakoff law firm.

"I know the people I meet through ICABA are going to be quality individuals with whom I would want ongoing business relationships," he said.

ICABA was important to building the counseling practice of Bessie Fletcher, president and founder of the National Association of the Mother Daughter Bonding Network in Hollywood. Formerly a banking executive and Urban League leader in North Carolina, Fletcher moved to Florida several years ago and was recently honored by ICABA for her work in strengthening family bonds.

Her background in psychology and graduate



Mayfield

degrees in community development and clinical Christian counseling were the basis for creating her international business, but she needed contacts to secure more local business.

"People who participate in ICABA are serious about the time they spend networking. They are results-oriented professionals. The conversation there is about how we can help each other," she said. "I don't like to stand around at a networking event, passing out business cards. I like to have a meaningful conversation and take it to the next level."

Meeting the right business contacts face-to-face was how ICABA helped Tunde Ogunlana, a financial adviser with Diamond Wealth Management in Plantation, which has sponsored an ICABA event.

"An in-person meeting always goes further in business because it's personal," Ogunlana said. "The people that I can do business with have to have certain credentials. ICABA's members fit those."

Bernard Lee, managing director and portfolio manager of international equities with Laurus Wealth Management in Coral Gables, agrees.

"ICABA hits the sweet spot with my demographic," he said. "My being a member has led to successful working partnerships and involvement with the community at the board level."