

In the Community

University and Vendors Come Together at Third Annual MWL Reception

Recent Contract Recipients from the MWL Mentorship Program Are Also in Attendance

“My plan is to have a long-lasting relationship with Columbia and step my business up to another level,” says Chris Chernak, president, Chernak Contracting.

Chernak is among the seven minority, women-owned and locally-based (MWL) business enterprises that have been recently awarded contracts with the University and were in attendance at the third annual MWL Reception held on July 31. The networking event brought together more than 100 vendors into the Kellogg Center in the International Affairs Building, where they were able to discuss work opportunities with key decision makers at the University.

While taking in aerial views of the campus, the vendors listened to speakers Joe Ienuso, Executive Vice President, Facilities; Warren Whitlock, Director, Construction Business Mentoring Services; and La-Verna Fountain, Associate Vice President, Construction Business Services and Communications discuss the University’s commitment to working with MWLs.

“It is important for Columbia, and for the economic vitality of our local community, to form relationships with qualified MWL firms that can grow with us,” said Joe, explaining the value the University receives in working with MWL vendors. He also noted that this effort is being advanced by the University’s MWL Mentorship Pilot Project.

Launched in January of this year in conjunction with the New York City Department of Small Business Services (SBS), the MWL Mentorship Pilot Project was established to help MWL businesses build capacity and earn contracting opportunities at the University. Twenty-one certified MWL businesses are currently taking part in the mentorship project and are participating in a series of courses in which they will learn about managing the full project life cycle and receive exclusive opportunities to bid on specific Columbia projects, leveling the field and increasing chances of being awarded contracts.

Seven MWL mentees have already received University contracts:

1. Spectra & Dean Construction Inc.(general contracting)
2. Jaysan Contracting Corporation (interiors)
3. Chernak Contracting LLC (carpentry)
4. KND Licensed Electrical Contracting (electrical)
5. Nobel Electrical (electrical)
6. ARK Systems Electric (electrical)
7. Eagle Two Contracting (general contracting)

Sandra Shillingford-Burton, Jaysan Contracting’ president, says, “Columbia’s program is something different — it’s a real mentorship program. Being taught as you go along, is a great experience. My goal is to get the most knowledge in construction as possible because it helps so much in every day life and work. Because of these classes, I have changed some of my business practices, and it has turned out to be most beneficial.”

Columbia encourages the fulfillment of additional opportunities for MWLs with its aggregate 25 percent minority, women-owned and locally-based (MWL) businesses participation goal for total construction, maintenance, and repair spend. The University will continue its strong record of seeking construction firms based in New York City, so that together the University and its vendors can grow and forge a long-standing relationship.



MWL vendors celebrate their recent University contracts at the third annual MWL Reception. From left are Chris Chernak from Chernak Contracting, Gideon Gabbidon from Spectra and Dean, Kristine DiNapoli from KND Electical, and Arsen Duweger from Jaysan Contracting.