

Professionals Gather at the Inaugural Louisiana Leadership and Diversity Conference to Celebrate their Differences and Fight Inequalities



Dennis Kennedy, Founder and CEO of Louisiana the Louisiana Diversity and Leadership Conference

“Deconstructing the Louisiana Glass Ceiling” – On March 23, 2012, the Louisiana Diversity Council held their Inaugural Diversity & Leadership Conference in New Orleans, LA to not only celebrate our differences, but also bring attention to issues related to workplace diversity and equality. In particular, the Council used the undeniable glass ceiling phenomenon that continues to dominate today’s workforce, as a conference theme and guiding topic for various panel discussions.

The one-day event featured panel discussions addressing issues such as the Glass Ceiling and recognition of both individuals and organizations for their success and strong commitment to diversity and inclusion.

Based on national averages, women in the workplace earn 77 cents for every dollar that male co-workers earn for comparable work. In Louisiana, women earn only 65 cents for every dollar as of 2011. This strong evidence of wage bias in Louisiana motivated the Louisiana Diversity Council to organize this year’s conference as the first step in their mission to dismantle the glass ceiling in the state.

“To see change in Louisiana, it’s going to take people coming together and speaking truth to power and thus challenging the current status quo of inequality”, said Dennis Kennedy, CEO and Founder of the Louisiana Diversity Council. “It’s going to take determination, commitment, and organization to dismantle the artificial barriers in our workplaces that impede the progress of both women and people of color”, he continued while identifying the Louisiana Diversity & Leadership Conference as a great opportunity to create awareness and trigger change.

While drawing attention to areas of concern, the conference recognized individuals and organizations that already embrace an inclusive philosophy and realized the potential of a diverse workforce. Thirteen Multicultural Leadership Award winners were honored for their leadership excellence and career achievements, proving the success of a diverse community. In addition, LSU Health Shreveport and the conference sponsors Entergy and Jones Walker received the DiversityFIRST™ Corporate Award, acknowledging their dedication to promoting diversity and inclusion initiatives and sustainable practices within their organizations and communities as a whole.

“We wanted to call upon the responsibility of organizations to their community. We wanted to call upon their responsibility to create a work environment in which all individuals have an equal opportunity to develop and compete based on merit and not one’s race, religion, nationality, age, disability, sexual orientation, and especially gender identity,” says Dennis Kennedy.

Attendees at the conference perceived it as a “very informative and insightful” event, which provided speakers that “were extremely knowledgeable about the discussions and shared very valuable points.” In particular, the “Women Take Care, Men Take Charge” session appeared to have an “enlightening and beneficial”

impact on attendees by addressing the different stereotypes associated with gender roles and how to overcome these detriments in one’s professional career. It exemplified the mission of the Louisiana Diversity Council to advocate for diversity and inclusion, while also offering individual advice based on community needs, an effort that was greatly appreciated by the audience.

Multicultural Leadership Award Winners:

Daniel Davillier, Owner, Davillier Law Group

Emile Bagneris, Senior Partner, Ungarino & Eckert, LLC

Jessica Monroe, Director, State Government Affairs, Johnson & Johnson

Kenesha D. Antoine, Managing Attorney, Law Firm of KD Antoine

Lacrecia Cade, President, Louisiana Association of Black Women Attorneys

Luis Leitzelar, Partner, Jones Walker

Representative Barbara Norton, State Representative, State of Louisiana

Shirley Roberson, Director of Multicultural Affairs, LSU Health Shreveport

Sonia Perez, President, AT&T – Louisiana

Toni Mobley, Vice President of Human Resources, Audubon Nature Institute

Robert Spencer, Human Resources Strategic Initiatives Director, Entergy

Valerie Englade, Vice President of Community Affairs, East Jefferson General Hospital

William Aaron Jr., Managing Partner, Aaron, PLC A Professional