

## Program aims to give minorities, women more WTC work

By DANIELLE WOLFFE

The pinnacle of the Lower Manhattan Construction Command Center sponsored conference for Minority and Women owned business was Lt. Governor David A. Paterson's announcement of a pilot program designed to help 30 small businesses gain access to building projects downtown.

The conference was held at the Borough of Manhattan Community College and was

intended to link MWBE owners and contractors with some of the key players in the 60 projects underway or in the pipeline in Lower Manhattan.

In addition to Paterson's announcement, small business owners scored prime networking time with some of the industry's top players, including representatives from Turner Construction, Tishman Construction, Bovis Lend Lease, the MTA, and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey.

"Normally, small business owners only obtain these

types of contacts through trade shows, and they don't have a lot of time to speak with the individuals who are doing those large scale projects. The one on one interview time at this conference, where small business owners got a full ten minutes to sit down with some of the industry's top players and explain to them what they do, was invaluable to them," said Beverly Bobb, project manager of the Opportunity Downtown Programs at the Lower Manhattan Construction Command Center, which organized the conference.

Panel discussions introduced audiences to representatives of banks such as CitiBank and sureties agencies like the Great American Insurance Company who provided information about small business loans and bonding requirements that could make or break a company's ability to obtain a job.

"In order to work on most construction projects, business owners need to be bonded."

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## More WTC work

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nesses and contractors need to be bonded. Some of the projects require bonding of over a million dollars. This amount is impossible for many small businesses to obtain. Sometimes, the inability to finance bonding requirements could keep a small business from participating in a project. At other times, it makes the difference between a business coming on as a subcontractor or as one of the prime players," Bob said.

Others explained that bonding is less of an issue than obtaining work.

"If the doors of opportunity open wide enough for minority and women-owned businesses in all facets of business — such as the opportunity to "meet the right contacts" (the people who actually award the work) the opportunity to bid on work and actually win, the opportunity to be paid on time after performing the work and the opportunity to obtain sufficient lines of working capital — issues such as bonding would work themselves out. Let's be real, it is hard to get bonding, when you can't get work," said Dickie Sykes, principal of DGS Consulting LLC, an MWBE based in Queens.

The Lt. Governor's pilot project will attempt to ensure that both access to bonding and access to work is made available to the lucky 30 businesses that are selected for the program. The program was established through a Memorandum of Understanding between the Lt. Governor and leaders of the Bonding and Surety industry.

Each firm selected will receive training from industry executives. The Jamaica Business Resource Center will provide technical assistance to businesses. Firms will also gain access to a group of attorneys and accountants who have committed to the project.

At the end of the program, the surety industry executives will recommend appropriate bonding levels, and help place each pilot firm on a job. The firms will be bonded for up to \$2 million from the SBA Bond Guarantee Program, and the Surety & Fidelity Association and the National Association of Surety Producers on bonds over \$2 million.

Paterson, who has gained a reputation for his commitment to MWBEs, said the program which will help these 30- businesses take a step onto the larger construction playing field.

"There are a number of construction projects both planned and underway that will strengthen Lower Manhattan as the financial capital of the globe and we want minority and women-owned businesses to be heavily involved at every turn," Paterson said.



New York State Lieutenant Governor David A. Paterson announces the launch of the pilot program to help MWBE.