

JUNE / JULY 2021

INFLUENCE **DICOTA**

CAPTURING ECONOMIC SPIRIT OF DIVERSITY IN COMMUNITIES, OPPORTUNITIES, TECHNOLOGIES & AMENITIES



KAMALA HARRIS

AMERICA'S FIRST WOMAN VICE PRESIDENT

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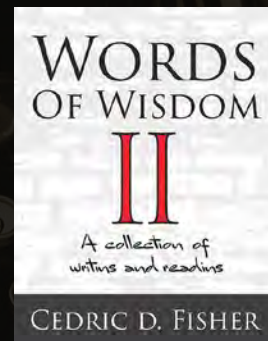
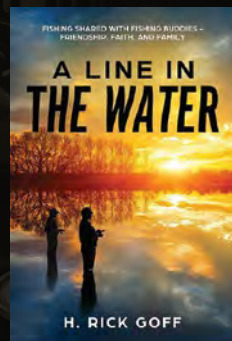


TABLE OF CONTENTS

EDITOR'S PAGE **4**

WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT? DICOTA **10**

COMMUNITIES PILLAR **14**

OPPORTUNITIES PILLAR **15**

TECHNOLOGIES PILLAR **16**

AMENITIES PILLAR **17**

DICOTA IN FOCUS **20**

COVER STORY 22

DICOTA IN FOCUS **26**

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION HIGHLIGHTS **38**

SPECIAL FEATURE **42**

GLOBAL EQUITY SHOWCASE **45**

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META J. MEREDAY
EDITOR IN CHIEF



Where do we go to get it right? That is the multi-billion dollar question that is being asked by diverse media platforms that continue to stand ready to showcase the untold stories, untapped resources, and dynamic resiliencies that create the multicultural communities in which we live, work and play. Pre-COVID-19, the findings were dismal regarding multicultural media investments and its potential impact on consumer growth. According to the report, "U.S. Multicultural Media Forecast 2019," conducted by PQ Media on behalf of the Association of National Advertisers (ANA), the findings showed that only 5.2 percent of the total advertising and marketing spending covers a multicultural consumer base that comprises over 40 percent of the U.S. population.

The purpose of this study is to provide insights to guide advertisers with data on demographics, media platform choices and media buying strategies. In the final analysis, the study highlighted that this disparity impacts growth opportunities by not putting more focus — and media investments - in multicultural consumers and their representative media. This was a "wake up" call for advertisers then, and it is an "emergency siren" now.

While the initial projections showed some progress, COVID-19 shifted us all as businesses — both large and small — were negatively impacted by the pandemic globally. Many of the previous facades in place that glossed over the lack of real development initiatives were laid bare and the results were disturbing. However, now we have an expanded agenda with the rise in leadership positions that include "Equity" in the title. Where is this investment going to be placed? If it is with the same general media platforms with a minor boon tossed to a struggling multicultural group during February (aka Black History Month), that is not equitable distribution of resources or planting a seed for growth and sustainability.

These newly coined "D,E&I" titles must include real fiscal authority to elevate minority media platforms — like INFLUENCE-DICOTA — that require the financial resources to showcase the releases and advisories that speak directly to and represent the global market we represent and serve. Movements such as ours create the ripples that disturb stagnant waters and toxic environments while providing enlightenment and knowledge. Moreover, multicultural platforms make sure that the 3-dimensional stories are told and that history reflects all participants involved and highlights the contributions brought to the table then and now.

Among the recommendations in the study are: increasing the "under spend" in multimedia platforms to reach more multicultural consumers; "leveraging" the digital media arena to reach multicultural consumers; and "incorporating" more diverse media experts to provide content that reaches both general and multicultural consumers. Here at INFLUENCE-DiCOTA, we stand ready to "get it right" with the right team to not only heal, but to keep it real with a focus on our Global IDEAA (Inclusion Diversity Equity Advocacy Access) model. Come join us! We welcome the partnerships! Our communities need the investment, not just interest. Let's do it!

Meta J. Mereday

DICOTA
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With every new venture are those who step out on faith to blaze new trails. We happily acknowledge those trailblazers, our DiCOTA Elite Subscribers, in this inaugural issue.

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WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

GLOBAL DIVERSITY FOCUS DICOTA IN ACTION

DIVERSITY IN COMMUNITIES - OPPORTUNITIES - TECHNOLOGIES - AMENITIES

What's it All About in Communities **Pool of Talent Crucial in Health Community Initiative**

Before the outbreak of COVID-19, there was a significant staffing crisis in the global health care arsenal as the numbers of community health care workers were diminishing. This dilemma was only made worse by the pandemic that caused already-stretched resources to become dire to non-existent.

In the blog *What Community Health Workers Want: A Combination of Incentives*, the World Health Organization (WHO) calls attention to this workforce crisis that has been growing over the years. In 2018, the WHO commissioned the development of its first-ever guidelines to identify not only the problems and concerns but also the solutions and incentives needed to increase the number of these essential front-line supports. The projected shortage has left the WHO and its global health partnerships urgently working on efforts to recruit and train community health workers to shore up the most vulnerable locations that would suffer the most. They estimated that global health systems will not have enough health workers to implement various medical programs such as Universal Health Coverage (UHC). The estimated worker shortage is expected to surpass 18 million.

The role of CHWs is broad, especially in global communities, where they often perform the duties of medical professionals such as doctors and nurses, whose numbers are often lacking in

rural communities. CHWs represent a vital link to the often limited medical facilities and possess specific local knowledge of the communities in which they perform their duties.

Addressing the potential shortfall early and providing the necessary incentives to generate a substantial pool of talent is a crucial health community initiative. The information provided in the WHO *Guideline on Health Policy and System Support to Optimize Community Health Worker Programmes* emphasizes the necessity of pro-action and community engagement by CHWs. Their voices and perspective should be represented in the policy dialogue.

Some of the underlying features that CHWs bring is outlined as follows in the guideline:

Health services do not naturally gravitate towards equitable outcomes. CHWs, by working at the front line of service provision in underserved communities, have the potential to contribute to a reduction in inequality in access to health services and health outcomes; but in order for this potential to be fully realized, equity considerations should be embedded at the outset in programme design, as well as in monitoring and evaluation of implementation and effectiveness.

Globally, we have a responsibility to increase the number of CHWs to be prepared for the growing number of health challenges that we are experiencing and the importance of local community health professionals.

What's it All About in Opportunities **Caribbean Nations are Making a Comeback**

In 2015, the World Bank provided an update on one of its regular features regarding the business opportunities that exist within the Caribbean. Largely known for its dependence on tourism with a beach system, this geographic area's laid-back lifestyle and tropical weather patterns warrant that focus. Despite the current challenges and economic upheavals, the opportunities that exist in this bountiful region still support attention for those investors who take a glass "half full" perspective.

The following countries exhibited significant resolve during prior economic crises and, with the right incentives and leadership, they can once again rise to the occasion with a core of business opportunities that would minimize their sole dependence on tourism, which has taken a hit since the pandemic. We will be examining the "opportunity portfolio" of a number of independent nations to determine what they are doing and how.

First, the Dominican Republic is one of the top leaders among the Caribbean's fastest-growing economies, according to the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America. Even

during a previous economic downturn, the D.R. has maintained its leadership and continues to expand in the areas of international trade and export growth.

Second, Guyana's projected growth in 2014 put it on track to dominate the market and become one of the fastest-growing economies in the region. This nation's growth is based upon its rich natural resources and agricultural sectors. Also, Guyana's projections for growth, based upon aid from foreign investments and off-shore projects, have helped to sustain its economy.

Third, St. Kitts and Nevis are two picturesque nations that manage to prosper in a number of different arenas. The positive impact of their economies is based on industrial services and agricultural sectors that have proven quite advantageous due to local natural resources. This also includes a strong reliance on the export of tobacco, beverages, electronics, and machinery.

Finally, one particular area of importance for the success of Caribbean growth and resilience is the remittances that these countries receive from their migrant workers in foreign countries. So, while tourism is making a comeback, the diverse Caribbean countries are incorporating a wide range of opportunities to grow and sustain their economies.



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What's it All About in Technology **Technology Opportunities Broaden the Network for All**

Several movements have created ripples in the stagnant waters of Big Tech, generating more discussions about the disparities in the technology industry. However, it is clear that these companies still have a long way to go in their practices and procedures in order to come anywhere close to other major corporations that are still trying to “do the right thing.”

Research has shown that Big Tech firms still maintain leadership hires that are 80 percent white and male compared to other industries coming in closer to 70 percent after the many years of D&I programs. Why is this important? The technology industry represents more than 10 percent of the national economy and is worth close to \$2 trillion. It is well documented that diverse business operations only increase ROI and while diversity programs have taken on added features with “equity” in branding, the lackluster results can no longer be buried under flashy advertising campaigns that fail to include diverse businesses and cultural considerations.

A report by management consulting firm McKinsey found that ethnic and gender diversity are directly connected to profitability. The

report determined companies that have culturally and ethnically diverse leadership teams were almost 35 percent more likely to show more impressive earnings. Despite these outcomes, Big Tech companies have not been very motivated to make any real changes and current projects seem to resemble more of the same.

In the midst of this scenario, grassroots efforts are taking shape to provide productive outlets for creating real, long term pipelines for the many under-served voices seeking to gain access to Big Tech and connect much-needed cultural and ethnic constituencies to the opportunities in technology and broaden the network for all.

Veterans Entrepreneurial Development Initiatives, Inc., Black Women Stand Up, and the U.S. Coalition of Black Women Businesses have formed a collaboration to build bridges between their respective constituents and Big Tech to create IDEAA (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Advocacy, and Access) modeled programs for long-term engagement and sustainability. “Whatever it took to fuel real action, we are now here and ready to be more than a two-month highlight, but a year-round partner,” stated Tiffany Braxton, Founder of Black Women Stand Up and Lead Partner of the collaboration.

For more information, contact 210.763.9674 or info@influencedicota.com



Photo by Taryn Elliott from Pexels

What's it all About in Amenities **Reviving the Wow Factor in Travel, Leisure, Home**

In the midst of the pandemic and scaled-back travel, we can still talk about the importance of hotel and resort amenities because they are still important features that enhance the travel experience – and we will all be back on track to have those experiences. New hotel brands and travel experiences are emerging or resurfacing, so keep in mind the items to look for not just in travel, but also in living arrangements, whether it's that short-term rental for work or play or the apartment you're considering to be your own home.

According to Hotel Tech Report, renovating hotel properties can be very expensive and time-consuming, but incorporating amenities is “an easy and high-impact way to stand out in your competitive set.” The article spotlights the amenities that travelers take for granted – and have been without lately like a free hot breakfast – and a few new additions that could make your hotel stay as well as your own home more enjoyable. The ABCs in this area (Amenities Basics Compact) include personal care items and toiletries, tissues, and coffee/tea set-up.

Current guests want the “wow” factor they were accustomed to in the 4- and 5-star locations such as contact-less technology, robes and slippers, in-room beauty treatments, and free Wi-Fi. Another “hot” feature is free parking, which is often a near-impossible amenity in major cities, but a luxury in less urban areas. Guests seeking more surprises during their stay have benefited from major chains such as Westin, which have partnered with New Balance to provide guests with running shoes and exercise gear so they can continue their workouts. Providing mobile check-in and simulated experiences also go a long way to increase business and reduce concerns.

A number of these amenities, according to ApartmentList.com, can work in your living spaces as well. A few things to look for when seeking that apartment or condo include parking and transportation (secured parking, guest parking, bike storage), other community items (doormen, laundry units or facilities, extra storage), and in-unit items (patios, high ceilings air-conditioning, fireplaces).

Amenities are equally important and require consideration in the diversity and inclusion discussion by the simple fact that many of these features determine price points and ratings.

COMMUNITIES PILLAR

First Pillar: Communities

Diversity in **Communities** addresses the advancements, successes, challenges, and motivations that impact the development of the vital interrelationships that bring us all together in the various communities that comprise our overall society. According to Socialmettle.com, the concept of community is explained as follows:

Usually, community refers to a group of people living in a common geographical location. This group of people obeys some social norms and some common values among themselves. As such, there are so many communities the world over, separated by languages, cultures, or geographical locations. However, they are related to each other in some way or other, thus making the entire world a one, single community.

Diversity in Communities focuses on these various connections within the business, political, socio-economic, health care, environmental, technology and arts, community development projects, and public/private sector arenas that directly impact the diverse communities in which we live, work, and play. By showcasing the insights, innovations, recommendations, and achievements within the various communities in our society, we can proactively spotlight the similarities and celebrate the differences within diverse communities that are the unique parts that create the shared experiences of the one, single community.

Providing an outlet to promote the lifestyles of a diverse base of lifestyles from the global community, it showcases the influences that make noticeable differences and subtle nuances that create interest to seek answers and connections. From neighborhoods, senior centers, college campuses, and office water coolers, the sense of community and its role is important everywhere.

For example, everyone should have a safe and decent place to live. The importance of providing affordable housing is a community concern consisting of many communities including senior citizens, millennials, middle-income residents, and first-time home buyers. We look at what public and private sector entities are doing within these communities.

The Communities Pillar encompasses homeownership, adequate housing, senior living, art colonies, renters, and holders of mortgages. These are just a few examples of the myriad communities through which diversity and inclusion emerge. These are untapped resources. Understanding the importance of diverse viewpoints and inclusive practices as it pertains to addressing the needs within communities, as well as the available resources, is the essence of the DiCOTA principle within the Communities Pillar.

OPPORTUNITIES PILLAR

Second Pillar: Opportunities

Diversity in **Opportunities** addresses the full spectrum of advancements, openings, challenges, and discoveries within our society which pose genuine opportunities to bring about a change for the better within the world at large. Whether it be educational achievement or an environmental breakthrough, the ability to feature the contributions of a wider range of experts, trendsetters, and newbies creates a broader appreciation for individuals who were previously "hidden" from the public view and expands the dialogue to create a broader base of discussion and discovery.

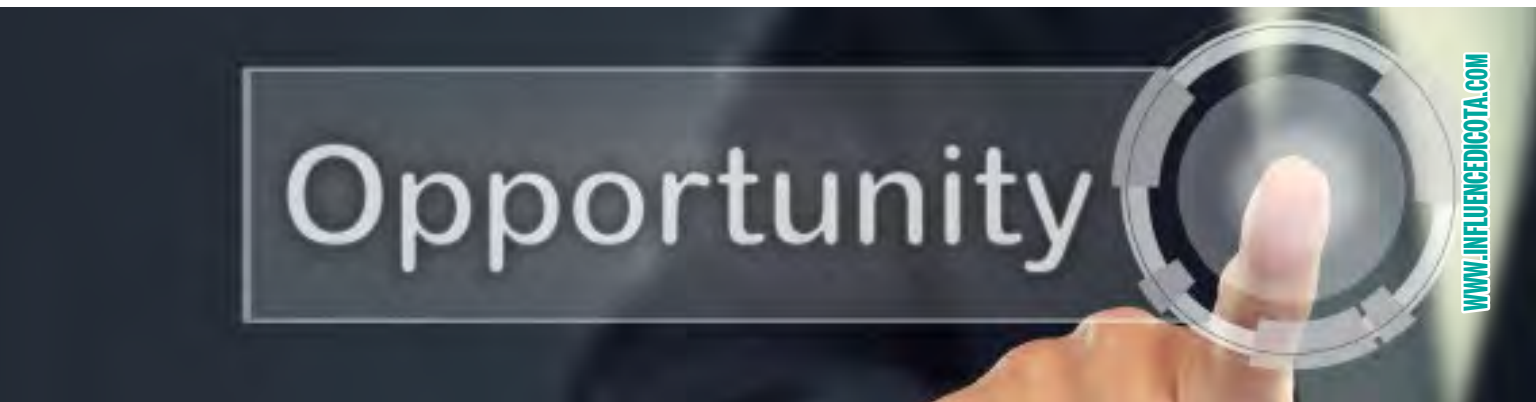
Diversity in Opportunities is setting the tone for initiatives that traditionally have incorporated unequal distribution of resources and limited outreach resulting in a lack of access by diverse, unrepresented constituencies and minimal, if any, opportunities based upon traditional, exclusive models. This pillar represents an outreach format and proactive agenda that is designed to generate a more equitable representation and promotion of the opportunities themselves and spotlights the resources to become engaged in the process. Studies have proven that opportunities, particularly in the area of professional development, are mutually beneficial and influential to all parties involved.

With Diversity and Inclusion re-emerging in importance within the private, public, academic, and medical sectors and the vital addition

of Equity and Engagement, it is crucial for the opportunities therein to be featured in a format that speaks to the broader community in a way that is conducive to the exchange of information and innovations to provide the long-term and sustainable infrastructure that will open doors for all.

Diversity in Opportunities will provide a unique perspective to highlight the projects, ventures, strategies, ideas, and initiatives that bring about awareness and empowerment to previously under-represented communities from a local, regional, statewide, national, and global perspective, in addition to opening doors for cross-dialogue and collaborations.

Furthermore, the most important aspect of the Opportunities Pillar is to create connections and jobs for long-term benefits. Emphasizing the "value-add" within the Diversity and Inclusion space, the Diversity in Opportunities Pillar will provide the stepping-stone for long-term collaborations and engagements designed for impactful and inclusive results and an impressive selection of story ideas and themes that provide a global representation of the world around us.



TECHNOLOGIES PILLAR

Third Pillar: Technologies

Diversity in **Technologies** pillar encompasses the trendsetters and innovators within the technology arena who have made ground-breaking achievements without the benefit of coverage or consideration. This pillar also brings to light all the advancements that have made a positive difference in our lives from a health perspective to educational platforms.

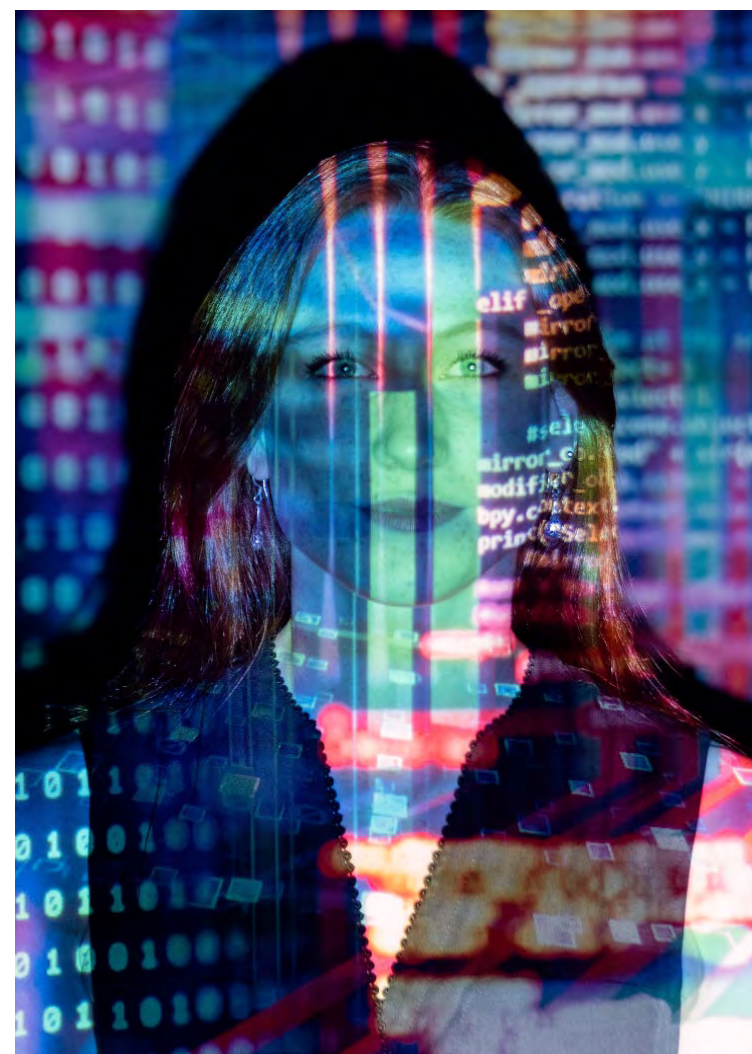
Addressing the contributions of unsung heroes and “she-roes” in the areas of technology, science, engineering, education, software, etc., and examining the current practices within this arena are crucial building blocks to securing the future of the overall industry. It also involves increasing the awareness about the contributions of all of its major players along with introducing new ideas that can lead to interpersonal breakthroughs and cultural achievements.

Diversity in Technologies also takes into account the breakthroughs and accomplishments of the new achievers and rising stars in the global community. This also provides substantial material for showcasing advancements and outlines the keys to success for opening more doors. In addressing the key concerns that have resulted in influential increases within the diversity and inclusion initiatives within this arena, Diversity in Technologies will provide a sounding board for insights and information sharing.

Diversity in Technologies also features significant contributions to science and technology that warrant the need for constructive insights and committed participation from the major partners within the industry to develop effective matrices to bring about more diverse and inclusive practices that can lead to ground-breaking changes within the framework of the technology world along with the emerging trends that have benefited from advancements based

upon the ideas and insights of visionaries from around the world.

The Diversity in Technologies Pillar shakes the dust off of the exclusionary practices that have limited access to resources and information and limited inclusion. This pillar emphasizes the importance of an inclusive workforce and supplier environment and it hopes to expand outreach and communications models to “walk the talk” and redesign the diversity and inclusion discussion itself to foster an industry model through outreach, communication, interaction, and exchanges that present a more diverse and inclusive mindset and methodology.



AMENITIES PILLAR

Fourth Pillar: Amenities

The Diversity in Amenities Pillar focuses on a broad range of cultural features that we too often take for granted, despite their enhancements to our everyday lives. Amenities represent the underlying features that are essential to our day-to-day operations that are so often under-represented in the diversity and inclusion space.

Diversity in Amenities reflects the areas on the periphery that encompass a wide range of support and resources – whether they occur by accident or design. For example, when someone is purchasing a home to live in or looking for a prospective resort to visit, amenities play a vital role in “closing the deal”

because it can transform the space to fit the exact environment you want to achieve, and that role is equally important for those in the diversity space.

Diversity in Amenities also includes the cultural representations that become the trendsetting models that influence how we think, what we wear, how we eat, with whom we interact, and by whom we are inspired. Business practices, artistic expressions, first impressions, fashion trends, home furnishings, and societal motivations are often manipulated by the amenities that are the most popular and without an entity that provides coverage of a diverse array of these influential entities, the aspect of a diverse and inclusive agenda is often limited or lost. Via an extensive process of showcases and engagements, this pillar will feature breakthroughs and trendsetters with a global sense of style and inclusion.

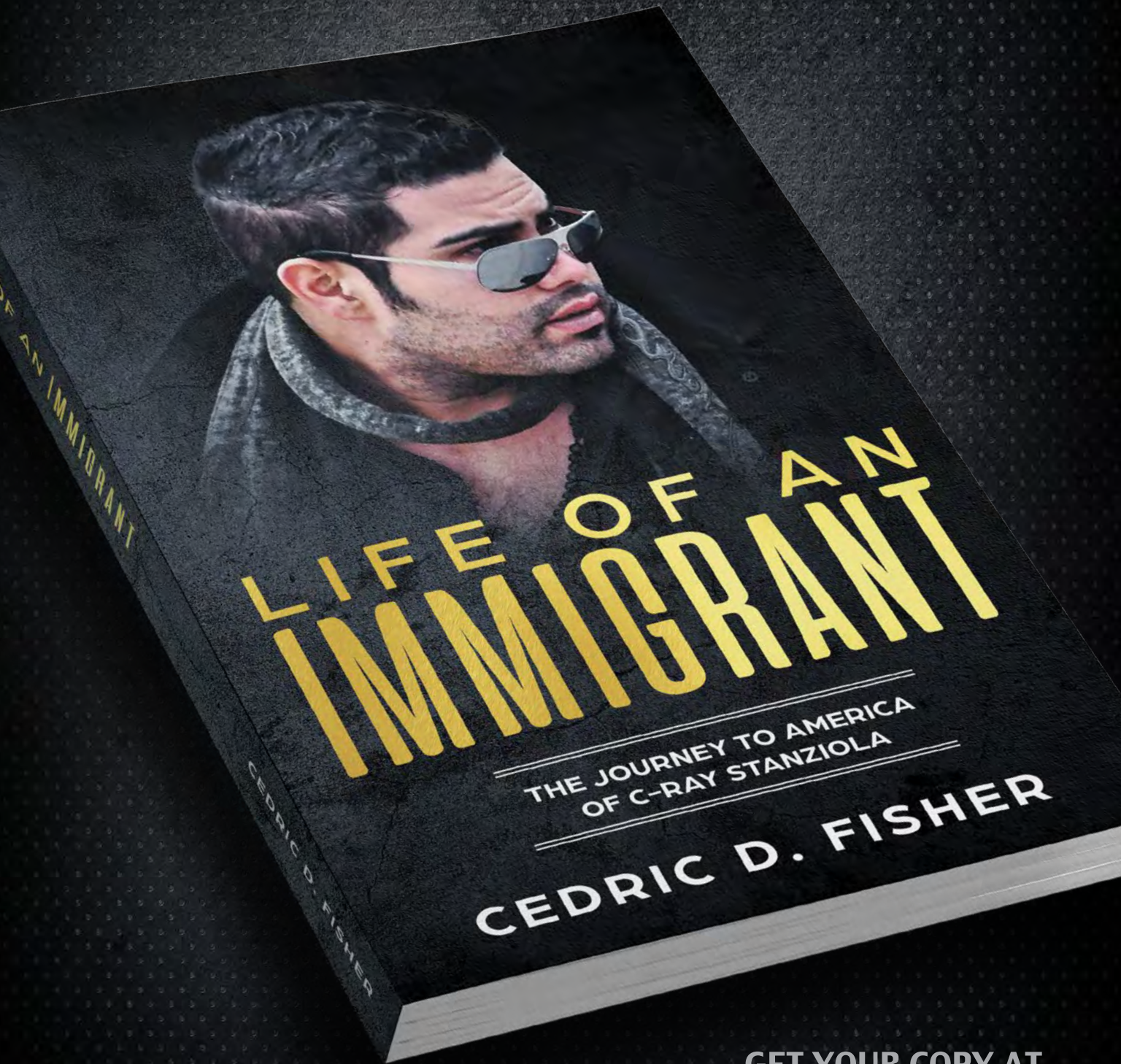
Diversity in Amenities provides an avenue to cover the industries that supplement the public and private sectors in an array of products and services designed to enhance overall appearance to increase value. Ranging from the arts and interior design to luxury products and premiere travel, the importance of diversity in amenities is clear as it encompasses a burgeoning lifestyle industry and cultural dynamic that has a long-term impact on the bottom line and society as a whole. Showcasing the importance of diverse viewpoints through artistic and architectural representations is vital to presenting a truly global and inclusive mindset.

The Diversity in Amenities Pillar brings out the creative factors that highlight the talents of those who bring us beauty through design and color and directly impact the value of properties and the influences of personal tastes.



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Living in My Skin: Black Men in San Antonio Tell Their Stories

From Skin to Linen
By Haylee Dobbs

The black community has endured inequality and racism for hundreds of years and continues to endure it. Being subjected to discrimination has shaped them into who they are today and their stories deserve to be told.

Lionel Sosa, a Latino portrait artist who specializes in oil on linen, has created a 30-painting project and documentary highlighting black men from all walks of life who offer their unique perspectives and usher in important conversations about race. He calls the project "Living In My Skin: Black Men in San Antonio Tell Their Stories." Sosa believes that "black men have historically been at the short end of every stick" and what he aims to do with this project is "highlight their plight."

These incredible works of art debuted with the intention of inciting change. This new sense of artistic motive appeared when Sosa came across a poster that read, "You can't be anti-racist unless you're actively anti-racist." From then on, Sosa strived to create something that would allow people to have a better understanding of each other as a community.



Shortly after the tragic death of George Floyd, Sosa was given the opportunity to speak with a black duo about the daily struggles of living in their skin. Along with the rest of the country, Sosa was not blind to the ongoing struggles faced by black individuals and it was the seemingly constant viewing of videos of injustice

that motivated him to narrow his focus on the lives of black men specifically.

Recounting a story of the first black individual to make a living from writing, Sosa expressed his concern about how their stories were so identical to those being told by black individuals today. "How little things have changed in the past 130 years ... Here is this man talking about how tough it was in the late 1800s and here are men today, in a supposedly sophisticated city like San Antonio, telling the very same stories." On the road to equality, we can look back and see how far we have come, but it is not easy to forget how far we have to go before we can overturn ingrained social behavior and injustice.



"These incredible works of art debuted with the intention of inciting change."



Photo by fatuxels from Pexels

Global Diversity on the Menu

With a Major Side
of Equity and All
Hands Included

By Meta J. Mereday

Despite the glib nature of the title, global diversity is a serious topic, one that has created possibilities for much-needed change within corporate America and the community worldwide. However, it can also be a more recent and glossier platform that makes all the appro-

appropriate noises but rings hollow and ineffective. The catchphrase leaves those in anticipation of finally getting their basic needs addressed (that long-term contract or set of promotions of fiscal responsibilities versus a big title for hosting events promotion) or just fills in the gaps with current and trendy words like a smokescreen camouflaging the standard activities.

In this era of pandemics, social unrest, and political and business upheavals, there is yet another corporate re-set that has been emerging over many years. It was fast-tracked in what will soon become known as the “Floyd Factor,” a significant motivator for global companies to ramp up their long-standing Diversity and Inclusion programs with more quantifiable models designed to create long-term and impactful results generating fiscal markers to truly “raise the bar” for diverse businesses to not only compete in the global environment but to also complete the mission. That mission was prompted by a phrase used by President Kennedy in 1961.

“Affirmative action” was cited in his Executive Order 10925, which directed the implementation of positive steps to “overcome obstacles to

equal employment opportunity.” JFK believed in the concept of diversity and its role in making life better for all. He once commented, “If we cannot now end our differences, at least we can make the world safe for diversity.”

The Affirmative Action Initiative

JFK’s order was fueled by the rise of awareness and activism within communities of color. It was primarily African-Americans (known as Negroes at the time) who would speak up about the levels of disparity and discrimination within contracting, due to the lackluster response and ineffective enforcement by leaders at the time. By 1965, it was evident to President Lyndon Johnson that there was a need to add more teeth to the initiative. Executive Order 11246 gave the Labor Secretary the responsibility to administer and enforce that order, which mandated that contractors “not discriminate against qualified applicants because of race, color, religion, sex or national origin.” The language of this EO reinforced the directive that contractors were to use “affirmative action” to combat discrimination in advertising, recruitment, and hiring practices.

Affirmative Action has set the standard for the catchphrases that corporate America adopted on its journey towards creating a “diverse and inclusive environment” for people of color in their pursuit of contracting opportunities. According to DifferenceBetween.com, the terms Affirmative Action and Diversity have similar connotations. It states, “Affirmative action and diversity are both measures that are taken to encourage corporations to hire and promote workers from diverse backgrounds. Both diversity and affirmative action focus on eliminating discrimination in hiring minorities including women, differently-abled individuals, and other groups of minorities who suffer from discrimination in the workplace.”

For those who believe that the emphasis on diversity in the global arena is a new and enlightened initiative, they are sadly mistaken. The current platforms rest precariously on the attempts of the previous seven decades.

They created a great deal of hoopla, some small achievements, and a long list of grand titles. Unfortunately, the promises and pledges that were made to “level the playing field” and “raise all boats together” have resulted in nothing more than increased culturally-focused entertainments to promote awareness and big crowds. It accomplished little else in the way of equitable distribution of resources that would create sustainable, affordable housing; elevate diverse, job-creating businesses; or dispel long-standing fiscal disparities and health inequities that continue to misrepresent the true wealth potential of the U.S.

The “Equity” Title

It is interesting that now the term “equity” is added to many job titles as if the “Diversity” and “Inclusion” components have been fully achieved. Looking at the most visible industry and the results of its efforts geared towards diversity and the impact on equity, a recent study the McKinsey and Company, a leading consulting firm, highlighted the ongoing diversity problem in Hollywood and its cost. The study reports that if the film and television industries made a “concerted effort to support black professionals in the industry and portrayed diversity in their projects, they could pull in an additional \$10 billion in annual revenues. Whether it is the film industry or

corporate America, the new awareness about Equity and how it must be fully integrated into the economic development model is crucial for these systems, platforms, paradigms, and assigned titles to effectively and impactfully work.

According to the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL), the focus should start with Equity, as Equity represents the foundational structure that – if implemented fully engaged and not superficially – could demonstratively enhance the Diversity and Inclusion agendas. CCL promotes this premise through its EDI format, which puts Equity where it should be: at the start of any initiative. Once Equity is raised, all other aspects are improved. According to CCL, “Leading with equity is about recognizing that different people have different needs and being committed to giving people what they need to succeed.

Elevating equity is critical because even in organizations that are both diverse and inclusive, individuals who come from different backgrounds can still run into policies, practices, or assumptions that prevent them from being fully engaged, supported, and able to reach their potential.” That is why the CCL promotes EDI versus DEI to further illustrate the important role that equity plays.

vAll Voices Heard

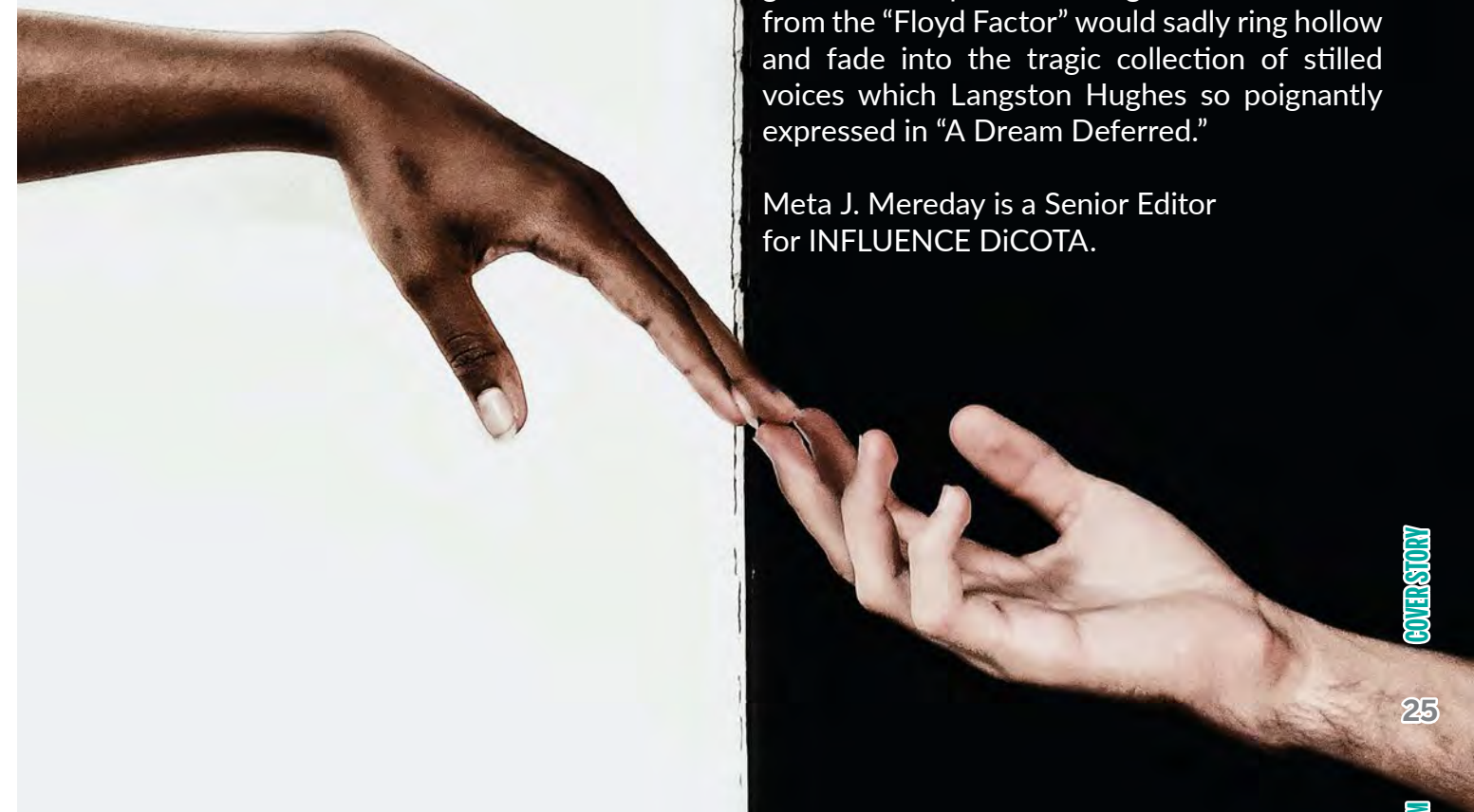
INFLUENCE-DICOTA brings together diverse and inclusive voices with more than “all hands deck.” We also address the importance of making “all voices heard” and telling the stories of diverse individuals from the global diaspora who are bringing positive and productive awareness and initiatives to their community and the world around them.

Our goal is rooted in generating equity that not only creates jobs, but chronicles lost histories and untold stories that highlight Communities, Opportunities, Technologies, and Amenities. Altogether, these provide a significant base for the societies in which we live, the shoulders upon which we stand, and the substance of the legacies we leave behind.

Whether it is a young African-American male making gourmet dishes, learning the culture of Ukraine, transforming the sport of basketball, or showcasing a hearty group of diverse seniors in the New York suburb of Queens who survived world wars, southern migration, racial discrimination, and northern redlining, these groups have been able to muster great wisdom and humor. Corporate America’s equity role must make use of media vehicles that reflect the wide span of the communities in which we live, work, and play as they represent the true “influencers” of society.

Without focused efforts to generate multi-cultural diverse models and inclusive platforms which are bolstered by significant equity and long-term resources, the new era titles and grand plans will join the ranks of the prior decades that represented laudable efforts but garnered few positive changes. The resonance from the “Floyd Factor” would sadly ring hollow and fade into the tragic collection of stilled voices which Langston Hughes so poignantly expressed in “A Dream Deferred.”

Meta J. Mereday is a Senior Editor for INFLUENCE DiCOTA.



“Affirmative Action has set the standard for the catchphrases that corporate America adopted on its journey towards creating a diverse and inclusive environment for people of color in their pursuit of contracting opportunities.”

Texas Hill Country Is Home to Equestrian Work Farm, Events, and Therapy

By Larry Hobbs

Winston Churchill once said, “There is something about the outside of a horse that is good for the inside of a man.” These organizations, developed by a dedicated husband and wife team, reflect how apropos that saying is within the scope of horse riding and equestrian therapy.

Fine Print Farms

Fine Print Farms is the realization of a life-long dream for Lori Seitz and an opportunity to “give back” for John Knotts. The equestrian center is a 100-acre site with a four-acre lake that includes amenities designed for boarding, riding, conditioning, training, schooling, and offers clinics in dressage, show jumping, and cross-country jumping. Customers have use of the clubhouse, a small lighted arena, and a Ringo round pen.

Hill Country Eventing Foundation

In addition to running the equestrian center, Seitz and Knotts established the Hill Country Eventing Foundation, a 501(c) (3) charity. HCEF promotes education about and participation in equestrian “eventing,” hoping to make South Texas and the Texas Hill Country a major destination for such contests. Eventing, also known as “horse trials,” is an experience where single horse and rider combinations compete against each other through three disciplines of dressage, cross-country, and show-jumping. Such events had their start as cavalry training for the military and have developed into a triathlon of skill, discipline, and timing.

Reckless Ranger

Reckless Ranger is another non-profit corporation established by the couple. The mission of Reckless Rangers is “to provide free equine therapy to disabled military service members and veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).” According to the Equestrian-Assisted Therapy (EAT) website, horses are typically non-judgmental, have no preconceived expectations or emotions, and are highly effective at mirroring the attitudes and behaviors of the humans with whom they are working.

Patients get an opportunity to note their tendency to engage in self-defeating and otherwise negative thoughts and actions. These realizations provide a basis for discussion and improvement. Modern forms of EAT began in the 1960s.

“There is something about the outside of a horse that is good for the inside of a man”

Dede Beasely, a nationally-recognized horse therapist echoes why horses are naturals when used in psychotherapy: “Like people, horses are



social beings whose herd instincts are remarkably similar to the family system. Horses have a unique ability to sense emotions and react accordingly. If someone is angry or aggressive, the horse may become obstinate. If the person is anxious, the horse may become skittish.”

According to the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship (PATH), “Equine therapy has been successful in helping patients show marked improvements in areas such as assertiveness, empathy, stress tolerance, flexibility, impulse control, problem-solving skills, self-actualization, independence, self-regard, social responsibility, and interpersonal relationships. They find strength, independence,

and emotional and social well-being through the power of the horse.” PATH estimates that 6,200 veterans have been helped worldwide with physical, cognitive, and emotional challenges.

The CRC Health Group in Cupertino, California says, “Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy is a form of experiential therapy that involves interactions between patients and horses. It involves activities such as grooming, feeding, haltering, leading a horse, and stable management that are supervised by a mental health professional, often with the support of a horse professional.” It is also known as “hippo-therapy,” which is the Greek name for horse. Surprisingly, patients



do not ride the horses as part of their therapy! Reckless Rangers is named after a decorated war horse from the Korean conflict. She was owned by Staff Sergeant Reckless and later purchased by the US Marine Corp. She served as a packhorse carrying supplies and ammunition and was able to dependably pack the supplies without human guides after minimal training. Here in Bulverde, Reckless Rangers has seven horses trained and dedicated to the therapy program, with hopes of building up to ten horses.

Knotts stays busy working with veterans in the program, working with program horses, providing leadership and program support, fundraising, and community engagement in order to

build Reckless Rangers. “We are looking for people or organizations to financially sponsor the horses used in the program,” says Knotts. “We are looking for support to build a new facility on the current property so that we do not have to vie with the host, Fine Print Farms, which is a working farm.”

About John Knotts and Lori Seitz

Knotts holds a master’s degree in Quality Systems Management from National Graduate School, is a Lean Six Sigma Master Black Belt from Smarter Solutions, has a master’s-level certification as a Change Management Advanced Practitioner from Georgetown University, and is a doctoral student in Organizational Psychology at Walden University.

Knotts’ consulting business is Crosscutter Enterprises, which helps businesses solve the complex challenges and decisions they face every day. Help comes in the form of strategic and business planning, strategic communication and marketing, process and performance improvement, and leadership development and coaching.

Transitioning from a military career to a civilian job tends to be difficult for many veterans, but was not a problem for Knotts. In addition to finding employment, he has the entrepreneurial spirit that “makes things happen.”

Knotts started several businesses and non-profits after retiring from a 21-year Air Force career.

In addition to his full-time job at USAA in San Antonio, he and his wife also manage Fine Print Farms in Bulverde. Knotts and his wife, Seitz, an insurance company attorney and President of Fine Print Farms, started the equestrian center in 2016 and have seen it grow into the epicenter of not only a horse facility but also two non-profit organizations and a consulting practice.

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DICOTA IN FOCUS

Chef Charles Carroll's Life Lessons Are Written in The Recipe

By Haylee Dobbs

Inspirational speaker, award-winning author, producer, and Culinary Olympic Gold Medalist are just a few of the titles that Chef Charles Carroll has accumulated throughout his career.

In his 2017 novel *The Recipe*, Carroll, along with co-author John David Mann, meticulously use each chapter to reveal a new life lesson that connects real life to the culinary world. One of these lessons is to "always be hungry." Life is not something that should be taken for granted; It is something to savor as you would food, asserts Carroll. "Taste everything, smell everything, listen to everything." Carroll explains that the novel continuously focuses on the healing that cooking provides and these valuable lessons lay out a fantastically-written path to rebuilding oneself.

*"Taste everything,
smell everything,
listen to everything."*

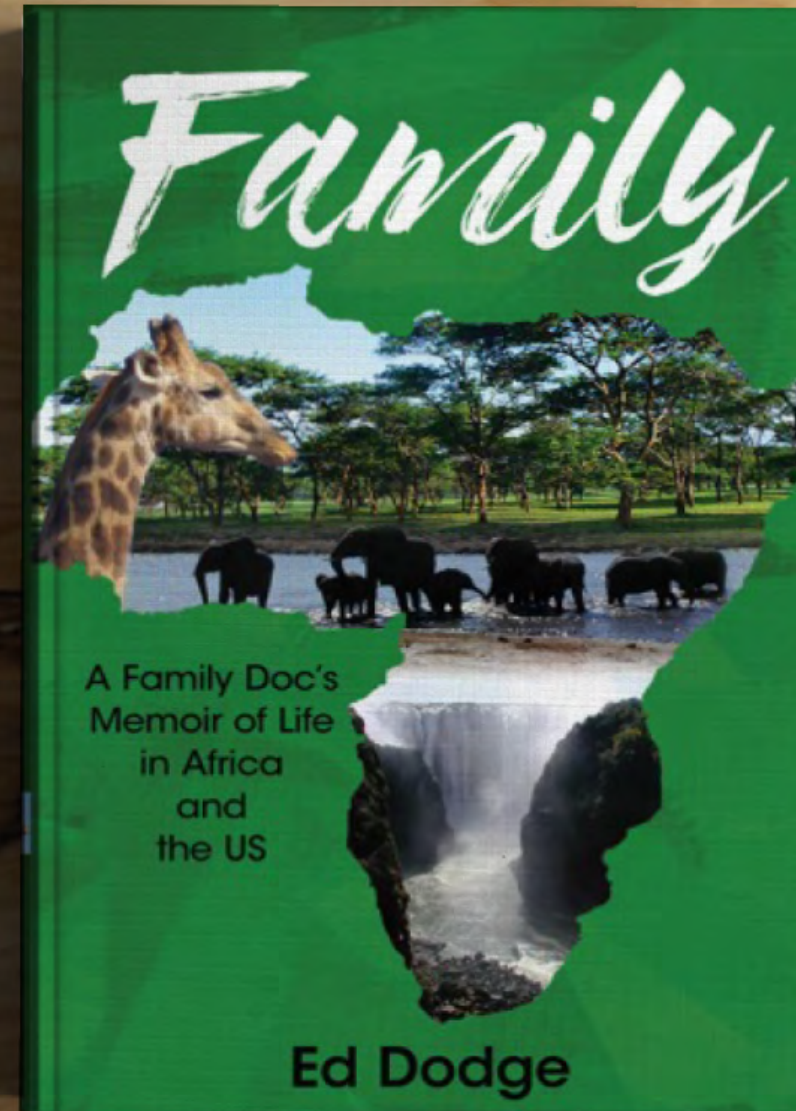
Owen, the young protagonist of the novel, spends time with an old chef who works with the boy on cleaning up his act and rebuilding his life after a tragedy. This is where lessons of patience, honor, and redemption come into play. The chef encourages the boy to find a love for the craft instead of waiting for the day to end. Now, it is important to recognize that – like the old chef – Carroll isn't looking for clock-in/clock-out mentalities. Those are a strong "no" for real-world and fictional chefs alike. What is actually important to chefs in the industry,



for example, is passion. When someone has an excitable fervor for food and it is clear that their position doesn't matter, that is what catches Carroll's eye when looking for new employees and that is where relationships begin to flourish.

Carroll enjoys using knowledge from his culinary work in Afghanistan to mentor his staff members and young individuals and, through his work, has learned a few prized lessons. He explains that his students remember the smallest aspects of a conversation he's had with them, which pushes him to recognize the importance of providing teachable moments every day. A few words can change a life and students from his past are proof that he set an example for them, that his influence pushes them to "always be hungry."

A Doctor's Adventure Through Life



Dr. Ed Dodge is a retired San Antonian family physician. He relives his experiences in Africa and the U.S. with special emphasis on measures that anyone can take to enjoy optimal health. He's available to speak to any interested groups.

To get in contact please call 352.228.9641 or
Email him at afritim36@gmail.com.

New Hires in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Within the global spectrum of corporate responsibility and community engagement, there are new hires and engaging initiatives that are breathing new life into the Diversity and Inclusion arena with a financial component designed to provide a real commitment to and investment in the vastly underserved diverse businesses and their multicultural neighborhoods.

INFLUENCE-DiCOTA is establishing a media vehicle that brings the hidden voices to the forefront to showcase the true results of these hires and initiatives. INFLUENCE-DiCOTA has a real responsibility to provide the 3-D (Delivering Definitive Difference) version of these new developments and announcement to make sure that those who have been consistently left out of the opportunities can finally reap real benefits from these advancements so that all involved can be included. As a diverse-owned multi-media organization, we know the importance that real investment can have and the results that can be generated when businesses are supported and the media vehicles in place to advance their achievements are included as well.

INFLUENCE-DiCOTA showcases new hires and spotlights not only their titles but also their work responsibilities and endeavors that encompass at least one, if not more, of the pillars that comprise the DiCOTA model. It is our objective to showcase and monitor the efforts of all those included in this special feature to emphasize that this groundswell involves more than token representation and flashy monikers, but real incentive to “raise all boats” to improve the livelihoods of all the diverse constituencies that INFLUENCE-DiCOTA represents across the globe through improved living conditions, created jobs and business opportunities, shared connections to technology, and appreciation of culture and amenities that speak to the diversity of the world in which we live, work and play.

Food for Thought and Making Room for Proactive Change

In a survey by Forbes Insights, over 300 global corporate leaders stated that they had a plan in place to recruit a diverse workforce. However, only 44 percent had retention programs that provide the needed training and support. This emphasizes the importance of both short- and long-term goals to make sure that the programs can succeed. One person – no matter what the

title – cannot change decades of the “isms” that have left out significant populations and negatively impacted diverse communities globally. We can recognize the following announcements, but we will celebrate when we see real results.

Let's begin...

Evelyn Boswell was appointed as the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Director for the National Association of Insurance Commissioners (NAIC). Boswell will be responsible for the NAIC's efforts towards creating a more diverse and inclusive workplace with the added feature of addressing the organization's Equity efforts. She will also provide oversight and handle the development of initiatives for the NAIC's newly created DE&I Council.

FBW Group, an East African Planning, Design, Architecture, and Engineering firm, was recently selected by the University of Global Health Equity (UGHE) to undertake a massive project involving the expansion of its campus in the Burera District of Rwanda. This multi-million dollar expansion project includes new classrooms, offices, and labs, as well as recreational amenities including sports grounds and event spaces. The company's objective is to transform

the delivery of health care in the region. Michelle Gethers-Clark was appointed Chief Diversity Officer and Head of Corporate Responsibility for Visa. She will head Visa's global efforts in diversity, inclusion, social impact, and sustainability. Her most significant role involves her oversight of Visa's social impact efforts which focus on equitable economic growth spotlighting small and micro-businesses. Gethers-Clark brings her strong social responsibility and community engagement background as the former President and CEO of the United Way of Greater Greensboro, North Carolina.

Indhira Arrington was recently hired as the Global Chief Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer for Ares Management. Arrington will lead the firm's internal DE&I initiatives internally and will function as an advisor for these initiatives throughout the company's related affiliates. She will also be responsible for expanding the recruitment, retention, and advancement of diverse professionals. Among the company's proactive agenda, is the role of signatory of the CEO Action for Diversity and Inclusion™ in addition to being a Founding Signatory in the Institutional Limited Partners Association (“ILPA”) Diversity in Action initiative.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY THROUGH ADOPTION: The Gaither Family's Quest for Espwa

By Haylee Dobbs

Enter Steven and Kristin Gaither, my uncle and aunt. One of their goals as a couple is to help people experience hope and healing they believe is found in following Jesus Christ. They know they can't change the entire world ... but what they could do is change the life of one person by working towards Espwa, the Haitian Creole word for "Hope."

The conversation about adoption began during a family road trip in December 2014. Steven could hear the sound of their kids watching the new *Annie* movie in the back seat and found himself being stirred by the story upon hearing one of the songs, "Opportunity." He felt the Lord poke his heart. "Hey, why not give another kid an opportunity, a chance?" he says.

A Moment of Clarity

Taking a break after doing a bit of research, Steven logged in to Facebook. A few of their friends from college had taken their adopted son back to Haiti for the first time since being adopted. At that moment, it was crystal clear they were being called to adopt and that they were to adopt from Haiti. They discussed the subject at dinner that evening. They decided to travel to Haiti in October 2015 to visit the orphanage their friends had adopted from. It was on this trip that they met their newest son – though they didn't know yet. All they knew was that on their final day in Haiti, they wanted to take one last picture with one of the boys. His name was Djeeby. The couple submitted their adoption application in December 2015 and were matched with Djeeby in May 2017.



Learning to Be Intentional

There is a process of self-recognition that occurs on becoming a white family with a black child. As Steven and Kristin prepared for Djeeby to come home, they were cognizant of the perceptions of the people around them. They did not want to be thought of as "white saviors" because they brought someone from another country and another race into their family. Their lives were focused on making Djeeby as welcome and comfortable as they could, doing their absolute best to become educated and intentional about everything, including researching the cultural differences between Haiti and America. They considered the culture shock Djeeby could have and they also wanted to make sure their other children learned with them. Steven and Kristin brought their three kids with them on a bonding trip in May 2017 to let them experience the new culture that would be introduced into their lives.

On July 25, 2019 – two years later – Djeeby finally came home! But as exciting and wonderful as the pair knew having another son would be, it was important to them to understand the changes Djeeby would experience and how this new world could affect him. They communicated with their college friend quite a bit to learn as much as they could about the challenges Djeeby might go through. "Some of the challenges they could face would be simple things that might trigger trauma for them," says Kristin. "Even though we know bringing them here is safer than where they were, they don't always understand that."

Says Steven, "You start thinking about generational trauma, what these people have experienced, what they've seen, their daily struggle ... even their idea of what America is. One of the striking statements that Djeeby said after he'd been here a while was that he'd had a hard day and he was sad. His quote was, 'I just didn't think I would be sad in America.'" Like that it wasn't even going to be possible.

What made Djeeby more comfortable was getting his first haircut from a black barber. He is generally a shy kid when it comes to meeting new people, but it was a great experience that

allowed him to easily talk with someone that looked like him – and he was able to have his hair look just like the actor Will Smith from the TV show *Fresh Prince*! He even had the opportunity to meet a few other Haitian kids in their area, which Steven and Kristin were excited about.

Introducing Djeeby into their family immediately diversified their family. They welcomed other non-white community members to interact with them to grow their connections with other nationalities

Discovering Racism

What is significant about the Gaither family's story, in my estimation, is Djeeby's introduction to racism. Before coming to America, racism was unknown to him; it had no meaning, as the orphanage was never exposed to it nor was it discussed. Learning that your skin color affects how people treat you can be shocking, especially to a fifth-grader who has recently arrived in America. But Djeeby's family gives him the honest and objective truth, lets him process his interactions, validates and encourages him by answering all of his questions and concerns head-on, and honestly addresses racial situations he sees in the news.





DICOTA IN FOCUS

Green Hill Music: Celebrating 25 Years of Diversity in The Recording Industry

By Haylee Dobbs

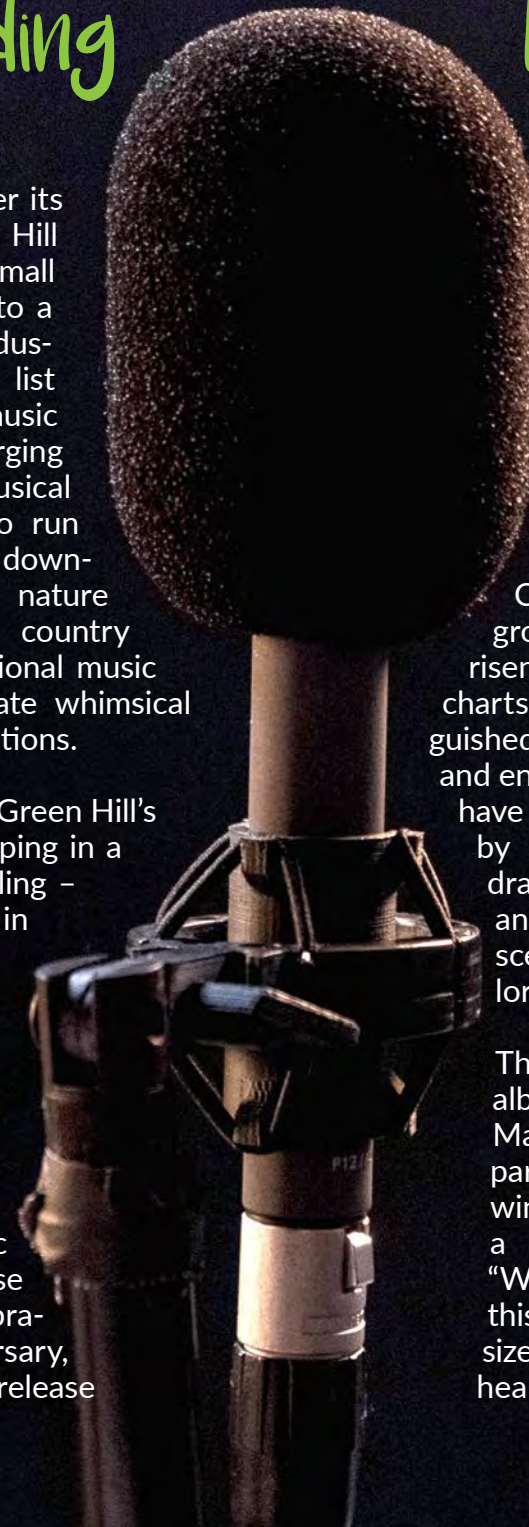
With almost 30 years under its music industry belt, Green Hill Music has grown from a small gospel music record label to a titan in the global music industry with a diverse client list chock full of established music legends as well as emerging recording stars. The musical stars within their portfolio run the gamut from best-selling down-home bluegrass, soothing nature sounds, and traditional country music hymns to non-traditional music experiences that incorporate whimsical pieces and fantasy compositions.

You are never too far from Green Hill's clientele, either while shopping in a major retail facility or strolling – at least pre-COVID-19 – in an amusement park such as Dollywood or Disney. Green Hill Music has set a new standard of diversity in production and presentation. Throughout their years working with a variety of music genres, Green Hill Music continues to deliver a diverse registry of sound. In celebration of their 25th anniversary, Green Hill Music plans to release

a chronological playlist of their works to all streaming platforms! They have thoughtfully included an eclectic array of genres such as Appalachian, Jazz, Latin, and Victorian, and will also be adding Celtic to their impressive list.

Green Hill Music also announced that they will be releasing a collaboration with Celtic Thunder, an amazing group of Irish singers that have risen to the top of the Billboard charts five times. This group of distinguished artists are skilled in both solo and ensemble arrangements and they have made a name for themselves by enhancing their shows with dramatic lighting, choreography, and beautiful sets that represent scenes deep-rooted in Celtic folklore.

The highly-anticipated shared album, *Homeland*, was set for a March 2021 release. They've also partnered with Grammy award winner Olivia Newton-John on a collaborative anthem titled "Window in the Wall," released this past January, which emphasizes the importance of unity and healing in the world.



Even though I, as a white American, have never experienced anything close to the level of oppression the African-American community faces, I've always worked hard to understand their experiences and do what I can to support minorities in my community. I have been emotional about those I see treated in disparaging and unfair ways, but it wasn't until Djeeby came into our lives that I felt true anger when viewing acts of racism. I think I speak for my entire family when I say our reactions to racism have changed. We are now protecting one of our own.

Having Djeeby in our lives helped us learn how to process what happens in society through different lenses and with much more empathy.

Our cultural walls are falling. We are learning to interact with people from different cultures and how to work through cultural differences. But most importantly, this precious child taught us there is always room for one more. Our family is not complete without him. Divine intervention was at work when Steven and Kristin didn't adopt from within America. God sent them to Haiti and specifically for Djeeby.

As there is much more to learn about the fight for Espwa, I encourage readers to become more educated about the experience of adoption and give just one child a chance, even if that child comes from your own country, or your own neighborhood, or has the same color skin as you.

**"EVEN THOUGH WE
KNOW BRINGING
THEM HERE IS SAFER
THAN WHERE THEY
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ALWAYS UNDER-
STAND THAT."**

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION HIGHLIGHTS

10 TOP COMPANIES DOING D, E, & I RIGHT

By Meredith Keller

The United States is changing, undergoing a paradigm shift in thought, action, and policy. Many companies have been implementing changes for years, but now it seems that almost everyone is beginning to see things through a different lens. It's as if the term "human relations" is slowly taking on a new meaning ... a truer meaning. Companies are becoming more focused on the actual human beings that keep them going and the idea of employing a "workforce" is slowly being replaced with the concept of nurturing a "collaborative team." These companies are leading by example and deserve to be celebrated.



USAA

Boasting one of the largest single-occupancy office buildings in the world, insurance, and financial juggernaut USAA must always find new and innovative ways to make every employee feel important in their goal to serve the nation's military families with dignity and respect. Women make up a whopping 53 percent of their workforce and their diversity goals completely align with their credo "Many Faces. One Mission." USAA features its diverse employees on its website. They consistently make the list of *People* magazine's "People Companies that Care."



Delta Airlines

Delta Airlines is the oldest airline still operating in the United States. The Atlanta-based company is blessed with a workforce of over 80,000 international employees. Delta states that it is committed to its DEI values as it "works to close representation gaps, strengthen our inclusive culture, cultivate a sense of belonging, and advance equitable opportunities for all employees to succeed." With an impressive 47 percent front-line managers being minorities, Delta is also a founding member of OneTen, a coalition of 37 CEOs across many different industries committed to creating one million jobs for Black Americans over the next 10 years.



FedEx

The mind-boggling logistics it takes to move packages around the world overnight takes true teamwork and that is what transportation giant FedEx works diligently to foster and reward within its ranks. Minority employees represent an impressive 51 percent of their global team and they strive to be "as diverse as the world we serve." FedEx was founded on the philosophy that their people come first and they are consistently lauded for their diversity and inclusion programs. Case in point: they were selected as a 2019 Best-of-the-Best Corporation for Inclusion by the National Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce.

Salesforce

When you're the leader in customer relationship management software and platforms, the concept of inclusion is paramount. Salesforce helps marketing, sales, commerce, service, and IT teams "work as one from anywhere so that you can keep your customers happy everywhere." With a robust employee base of both minorities and women holding key management positions within the company, Salesforce believes that equality empowers its people to build deeper connections with colleagues, thus building better customer relationships as well. The company was recently ranked #14 on Forbes' list of Best Employers for Diversity in 2020.



Accenture

With over half a million employees spread across 200 cities in 50 different countries, this business consulting giant strives to meet the changes and challenges with innovative strategies and a corporate culture that "creates an environment that unleashes innovation, allowing our people to perform at their very best and underpins a culture where everyone feels they have an equal opportunity to belong and build a career." Over 51 percent of the Accenture global team is made up of minorities and the company has recently launched an initiative to achieve a gender-balanced workforce by 2025.



Southern Company

For more than a century, this energy innovator has served the Southeast and they have made a name for themselves as a leading producer of clean, safe, reliable, and affordable energy. Southern Company "commits to promoting an actively anti-racist culture and to ensure that all groups are well represented, included, and treated fairly within all levels of the organization." The company values career employees and 31 percent of their workforce have been with the company for over 20 years. Southern Company is consistently awarded a top military-friendly employer and ranks annually on the DiversityInc Top 50 list.

abbvie



AbbVie

This patient-focused, specialty biopharmaceutical company has a diverse global workforce of scientists, researchers, manufacturing specialists, and regulatory experts. The company's demographics are very diverse with women making up 52 percent of the workforce. AbbVie "embraces equality, diversity, and inclusion" and they are "proud to offer an environment that allows colleagues around the world to achieve their full potential." This medical science leader is deeply committed to its DEI programs and ranks high on the Human Rights Campaign Corporate Equality Index.

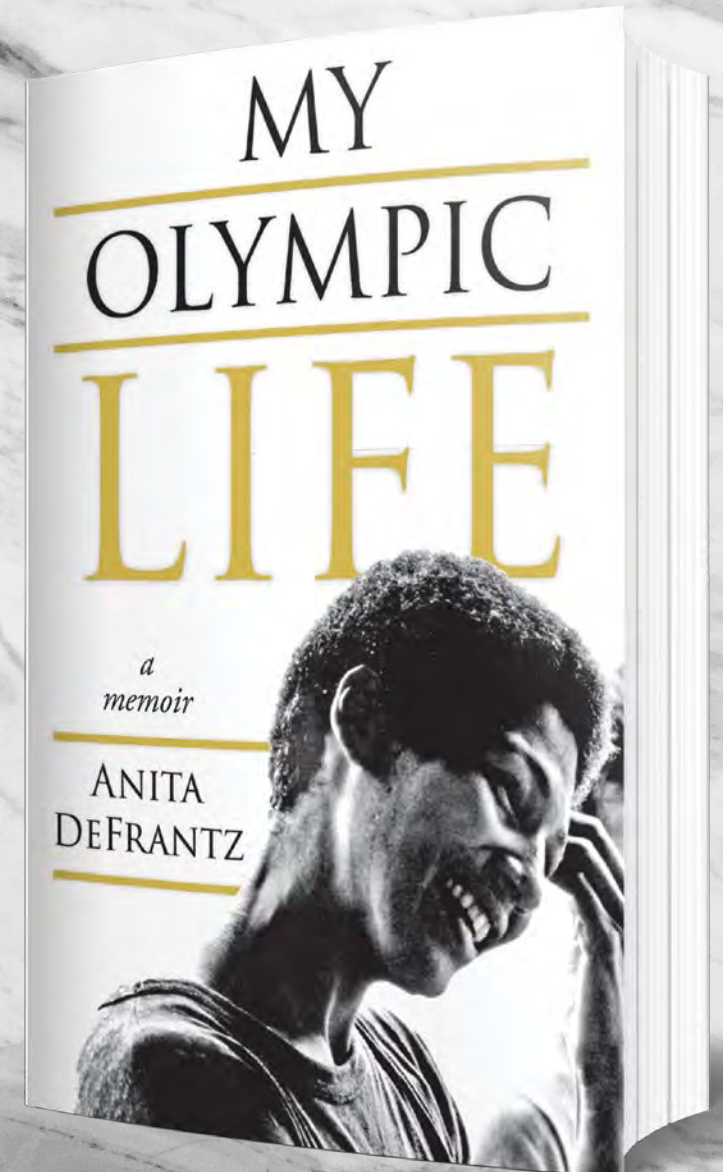
RingCentral®



Ring Central

This technology leader creates seamless business communications solutions for companies of every size across the world. Ring Central's diversity and inclusion initiatives "honor the unique background, identity, ethnicity, and perspectives of each individual." Their executive team roster is very diverse. Employees say that they feel valued and have a sense of ownership at Ring Central. The company recently won Top CEO for Diversity and Top CEO for Women awards from Comparably.

“ DeFrantz pens her journey through those years of competition and her tenacious determination to be a game-changing force for women, minorities, individual rights, and equal access to sports in her victorious memoir ”



Available at **amazon.com**



Adobe

A leader in computer software design, Adobe has always been on the cutting edge of technological advances, creating software and platforms that serve just about every technology need a business may have. Their leadership is diverse. Twenty-five percent of the executive positions are filled with minorities. The company lives by its values and defines its diversity mission as "valuing the unique life experience that every employee brings to work every day." Adobe recently made the list of *Fortune's* Best Workplaces for Women, and they consistently make their list of Best Workplaces for Diversity.



KeepTruckin

Efficiently finding a way to manage a company's transportation fleet is imperative for maintaining productivity standards and KeepTruckin has one of the best application systems in the transportation management industry. While the demographics in the transportation industry skew predominantly male, this company openly creates a diverse and inclusive work environment by "creating spaces for underrepresented employees to connect, collaborate, and develop their careers." One of the smaller companies making a difference, KeepTruckin recently made the elite Comparably list of 10 Companies with Impactful D&I Initiatives.

KAMALA HARRIS MAKES THE IMPOSSIBLE POSSIBLE AND TAKES THE HIGH ROAD EVEN HIGHER

By Meta J. Mereday

Elizabeth Cady Stanton, abolitionist and early women's movement advocate addressed the importance of history this way: "The history of the past is but one long struggle upward to equality." Our current turbulent conditions have created not only a resurgence of upheaval and resistance, but also historical circumstances bred from the struggles of the past that harbored racism, sexism, classism, and colonialism.

The "isms" of our past generated a groundswell during an election process in the U.S. that was followed with bated breath by the world at large and contested – some say largely based on falsehoods and fabrications and others saying it's well beyond the time for common sense to concede so as to concentrate on the pressing issues at hand. Those issues range from the raging COVID-19 pandemic to the abandonment of children crossing the border illegally seeking a new life.

Once the votes were certified, history was made when Joe Biden, former Vice President, Delaware Senator, and a "Son of Scranton" became the 46th President of the United States and his running mate, Senator from the Golden State of California and former California Attorney General, Kamala

Harris, became the first African American and Asian Indian to become Vice President.

More than Ready for the Task

Vice President Harris is developing her team and receiving her assignments from the "leader of the free world" who she comfortably calls "Joe." Undoubtedly, her role will set agendas that will have a lasting impact in far-reaching areas that will be unprecedented. Many believe that she is more than ready for the task and she has the ear – and speed dial number – to key women who stand ready to assist her. She could ask former First Lady Michelle Obama about taking the lead. Michelle once said, "You may not always have a comfortable life, and you will not always be able to solve all of the world's problems at once, but don't ever underestimate the importance you can have because history has shown us that courage can be contagious and hope can take on a life of its own."

Vice President Harris' addition to the ticket sparked a resurgence in previous under-represented communities. They finally felt like they could have a true advocate in the upper echelons of government and she was not unaccustomed to breaking through barriers and being among the first to do so. It has become a significant aspect for women who are also persons of color, through the ages, to have

"OUR UNITY IS OUR STRENGTH AND OUR DIVERSITY IS OUR POWER."



Photo by Aaron Kittredge from Pexels

forged their own way to be heard and seen. The "invisibility" factor has only just begun to fade away in the midst of "woke" agendas and determining exactly whose lives matter more than others. All lives matter!

The Distant Ring of Promise Grows Near

The voting population became diversified almost overnight as young and old stood together to face various political conditions and human reactions – including intimidation and misdirection – to cast their vote for a change in which they could believe. Whether it was a Sister Circle, a Men's Group, DiverseVote, New Voters Unite, Southern Belles4Change, or NYStrong for Joe and Kamala, it was clear that unacknowledged voices were finally able to hear that distant ring and potential promise etched in the crack of the Liberty Bell.

One group in particular, SistersUnited4Reform, which represents 55 million women strong from diverse backgrounds, sent their message to their "sister in the struggle" that any verbal attacks against Harris involve them as well and they stand with her. It is unfortunate that a medium designed to increase social connec-

tion across miles and borders can be used to dispense so much hate and discourse. However, the "Sisters" made their stand before the election and the resonance of their statement rings true even now. "We are raising our collective five million voices to uplift and encourage you. The strength and power you represent put fear in some. When you are demeaned and disrespected, all African-American women are demeaned and disrespected. We will not let this continue without a response." They added that there is historical significance and lead roles that need to be taken in this society.

They went on to say, "It was a black woman who was the human computer that insured a man got to the moon. It was a black woman, who by the strength of her will, would not be moved from her seat on a city bus and thus started a movement. It was a brave black woman who took her own folding chair when she could not get a seat at any political party's table. And it is black women who have raised powerful children alone and have become public advocates themselves when their men of the movement are murdered."

Working Together

With all of that history and support, who better to take on the enormous task of dealing with the surge of immigrants at the border? We at INFLUENCE-DiCOTA strongly believe in the importance of a diverse and equitable platform that enhances Communities, Opportunities, Technologies, and Amenities in the global arena and we stand ready to promote any efforts to provide positive, productive, and proactive movements that will protect our borders, but provide the humanitarian aid that benefited a devastated Europe via the Marshall Plan following World War II. This is the time for a New Century Plan that replenishes the war-torn and environmentally-stricken countries of Mexico and Central America that have fostered this surge. There is no simple solution or magic formula, but all hands are on deck and working together. Vice President Kamala Harris requires

the energy, ideas, and efforts of all Americans united in promise and purpose. One of her well-known quotes speaks to her resolve and commitment. She has often stated, "Our unity is our strength and our diversity is our power."

The election of 2020 provided an opening for the belief that the "impossible is possible" and now, while fighting COVID-19 and acknowledging that climate change is real, we must stand together with a unified front and pool our diverse talents and resources to uplift our neighbors at the southern borders and protect the lives of innocent children. Working together to "take the high road higher" can only reap great rewards for all involved and truly unite and elevate these American states. To my leader Vice President Harris as well as my soror Kamala! We too have your back!

HEALTH CARE GIANTS MUST FOCUS ON DIVERSE APPLICATIONS IN THE COMMUNITY COVID RECOVERY PROCESS

By Meta J. Mereday

As a journalist who has often played dual roles due to my commitment to serving the community in the time of crisis, I found myself on the streets of my city, New York, at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in March of 2020 when the world was still trying to figure out what was going on.

I was not planning on "reporting" about this situation or calling to attention situations that negatively impact the most vulnerable in our communities. It was not like my experiences at Ground Zero, as a 9-11 first responder, who gave reports to news wires across the country about the devastation wrought by the surprise attacks on September 11, 2001, that left close to 3,000 people dead in three different locations in one day and continues to claim the lives of those exposed to toxic fumes and elements up through the present day. However, here I am, a year later, at a "temporary" gig that was supposed to last a mere few months, filling in at the office of a critical care physician in South Queens, New York.

Beyond Hatred and Finger-Pointing

Due to my exposure at Ground Zero and as a New York Strong Responder and Community Advocate, I have medical challenges that continue to wreak havoc on my body and everyday existence. I was once told that I am still here because I was never a smoker. The doctor who originally diagnosed my 9-11-related conditions almost 15 years ago died because he was a smoker and his immune system was not strong

enough to fight the effects of exposure in the "Pit." So who better to write about the health gains and losses in this pandemic and what lessons have still not been learned in these 20 years since the towers came down.

In addition to the misguided implementation of resources and the costly delays and divides that heightened the death tolls, the levels of hate and finger-pointing were maddening... similar to what Muslims experienced immediately following 9-11. Once again, heightened emotions and accusations were allowed to overshadow the importance of ramping up support services and bringing calm to a troubled nation and world. I won't dwell on those negative components that garnered more than enough media time and exposure, but they do warrant mentioning, as does the remembrance of those lives lost in the midst of it.

Instead, I want to focus here on the unsung heroes, the health champions who stepped forward, and the lab workers and researchers who continued to work behind the scenes in the midst of the unnecessary noise to bring about answers and relief globally to those stricken with no help or. And even more important at times, I want to focus on hope! The connections between 9-11 and COVID-19 are significant as 9-11 first responders like me with compromised conditions were asked to participate early-on in testing for the vaccine.

Better Safety Measures

A great deal of the research that was done on us and our emerging medical conditions were



Photo by Markus Winkler from Pexels

used as a basis for the work towards a vaccine. Many of the safety measures were put in place as more awareness came to the forefront about the wave of the “rona” during and following 9-11. During the early days in Lower Manhattan, we only had paper masks to use as we delivered refreshments and supplies to the rescue sites at Ground Zero and to many stranded residents. Who really paid attention to the fact that the light blue masks were a dusty black by the end of our shifts?

The impact of the COPD and cancers of the esophagus, brain, lung, and other serious diseases on first responders provided a strong footprint for COVID-19 research and the journey toward a vaccine. In a move that President Biden termed an “example of industry coming together for the common good,” pharmaceutical giant Merck agreed to work together with one of its fiercest rivals Johnson & Johnson to increase the production of available vaccines. The importance of this alliance, especially during a period of peak performance on the stock market in the health care arena is huge and will undoubtedly lead to more mergers and even larger health concerns. In the article, “A Vision of Healthcare in a Post-Covid-19 World,”

by Raphael Rakowski for Medically Home, it was emphasized that the pandemic accelerated one of the world’s largest healthcare trends: moving the delivery of health systems from hospital settings to local communities and homes. The concepts geared towards mobile triage are not new, but the enormous need to redirect resources outside of traditional facilities has given rise to a wide range of opportunities for individuals working within the C-Suites of the health care industry, on Main Street, and right in their homes.

Incorporating new imperatives into this arena will provide a much-needed overhaul. There has been some movement, but not enough to address the rising needs within the medical field and the increased costs for health care. Many of the existing flaws within the system became even more glaring in light of the lapses in coverage for a wide range of the population who lacked the resources and access to available testing modules that were designed specifically for them. The lack of integrated systems and out-dated equipment only added to the often shocking disconnect resulting in poor to non-existent patient care or overburdened systems.



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Affordability and Accessibility

The importance of a health care delivery system that provides multi-faceted models to address the diverse population is apparent and requires a unified effort from leading health officials, major pharmaceuticals, insurance companies, federal/state/local elected officials, community leaders, and health and wellness advocates, et al, in addition to leaders in housing, transportation, and technology delivery systems. A few of the trends that were already in place included the growth of community-based facilities that took up smaller footprints, thus allowing greater direct access to target communities. For example, dialysis units have increased visibility in communities experiencing high rates of kidney disease to provide better access for patients. Also, almost half of elective surgeries are being performed at outpatient surgery centers rather than at the larger hospital facilities. This represents another proactive nod towards community-based formats that

provide better accessibility for patients who too often find larger hospitals harder to get to and manage upon arrival. These steps are only the beginning. The pandemic has pulled back many of the initial delaying tactics that the healthcare giants relied on for too long. Now, there is an opportunity to get it right, get it done, and make it affordable and accessible for all.

We now see a downplaying of our reliance on in-office visits and an increase in telemedicine options and capabilities, as well as increased utilization of churches, mosques, and synagogues as health delivery locations. We are creating “health campuses” with a more integrated focus that includes health clubs, assisted living, and community health programs. It is clear that COVID-19 has set the tone for revamping our total health care experience, with the possibility of broader opportunities for engagement and more inclusive practices via these diverse options.



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