

URBAN LEAGUE CEOS COMPARE NOTES AT THE BEACH



Written by CYNTHIA ROBY



FORT LAUDERDALE — The attire was beach-chic. The history shared was that of black swimming. The goal was to celebrate the National Urban League's 100th anniversary, and the Urban League of Broward County's 35th.

Roughly 67 National Urban League staffers and CEOs from the organization's 97 nationwide affiliates gathered at the International Swimming Hall of Fame in Fort Lauderdale on Jan. 22 for a "Sunset Soiree."

Germaine Smith-Baugh, the Urban League of Broward County's president and CEO, described the evening as "a combination of history, education and fun."

The Soiree, sponsored by Urban League of Broward County and The Greater Fort Lauderdale Convention & Visitors Bureau, served as down time for the league's annual Association of Executives Mid-Winter Conference.

"It's a small get-together," said Lisa Williamson Barker, the league's vice president of development. "It's a party where people can relax, eat, drink, be merry and dance."

A five-day event that opened Jan. 19, the conference focused on strategic planning with the National Urban League's staff and affiliate presidents, Smith-Baugh said.

"It's an opportunity for training with a lot of focus on fundraising," she said. "We are in a tough economy; looking at new ways to raise dollars is important."

The conference also provided an opportunity for Urban League leaders to share best practices amongst the affiliate network, Smith-Baugh said.

"If I am running a program that seems to be doing well and you are interested in it, then the conference is an opportunity to sit down and share the practice strategies in place within our organization," she said. "This helps us to grow and sustain ourselves."

The National Urban League was founded in 1910 in New York City. The organization, still headquartered in the Big Apple, spearheads the efforts of its local affiliates through the development of programs, public policy research and advocacy, according to its website. In March, the National Urban League will launch its "I Am Empowered" campaign, declaring a focus on education, health, jobs and housing, Smith-Baugh said.

"These declarative statements are areas that we want to, in collaboration with our local communities, influence," she said. "Clearly, we are doing that anyway, so these are just clear statements and a pledge to get people more involved in the league in their own ways around those four areas."

Marc Morial, the league's national president and CEO, described the campaign as "a call to action to empower and transform communities."

He continued: "This is a big year for us. We are getting people involved; our communities need us more than ever."

As the new president and CEO of The Metropolitan Orlando Urban League, Allie L. Braswell said the conference and the Soiree allowed him to "get plugged into the league's key leaders."

From a historical perspective, Braswell said, "we discussed how to leverage our services to benefit our communities."

Broward Urban League board member Circuit Court Judge Elijah H. Williams said he sees firsthand the results of the organization's work.

"We are at war for the hearts and minds of young children. But with the programs they [youth offenders] complete through the league, the rates of recidivism have decreased," he said.

Williams described the league as "a powerful organization" and commented that the [I Am Empowered] campaign will be "of great benefit to all communities."

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Photo by Mychal McDonald. Germaine Smith-Baugh


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