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Diversity celebrated by Chamber, Riley institute

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By Julie Howle
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Keith Clifford Barksdale Jr. has made increasing awareness of the importance and benefits of diversity a constant part of his life.

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The Christ Church Episcopal School senior has been a delegate to state and national diversity conferences made diversity the topic of his senior project.

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Barksdale was one of six people, businesses or organizations honored for efforts to promote diversity in the Upstate with the first annual Upstate Diversity Leadership Awards at a dinner at the Palmetto Expo Center Tuesday night.

The awards were presented by the Richard W. Riley Institute of Government, Politics and Public Leadership at Furman University and hosted by the Greater Greenville Chamber of Commerce in cooperation with the Chambers for the Anderson and Spartanburg areas.

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More than 600 people came to the event in celebration of the Upstate's growing diversity. Lawrence Nichols with Clemson University was one of those 600.

Nichols has experienced firsthand the joys of embracing diversity, from the 14 years he and his family have opened their home to people from different countries.

"I think we're working toward diversity, and I think we're making all the right moves," Nichols said.

Six people or groups who have helped the Upstate make the right moves were honored at the event in different categories, a high school student, college student, non-profit organization, business, international contributor and an individual.

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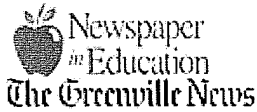
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Calder Ehrmann, chief diversity officer with Michelin North America, was honored for his achievements as an individual in promoting diversity. AnMed Health Office of Diversity was honored as a business, the International Center of the Upstate in the international category and the University of South Carolina Upstate as a non-profit. Barksdale was honored in the high school category and Nadezhda Savova, a student at Furman University, received the award for the college student category.

Former U.S. Secretary of Education and Governor of South Carolina, Richard Riley, spoke at the event, along with Juan Johnson, vice president of The Coca-Cola Company and president of Diversity Leadership Academy.

Johnson acknowledged the outstanding work and progress the Upstate and these groups have made, identified ongoing challenges and highlighted a new level of expectations for continued work.

The awards and event were the brainchild of graduates of the Upstate South Carolina Diversity Leadership Academy, one of about 20 programs of the Riley Institute, which was created in 1999.

Don Gordon, director of the Riley Institute, said the Upstate Diversity Awards is a first this year and came from a group of people who were in the second leadership academy. He said the location for the annual event will rotate between Greenville, Anderson and Spartanburg.

"We need to use our diverse community to achieve," Gordon said. "We try to bring people together."

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