

# The ones who reach out

## Diversity celebrated at annual banquet

BY ANNA B. BRUTZMAN  
staff writer

Whether their divisions are drawn by race, language, wealth, nationality, political conviction or taste in music, a group of Upstate leaders get together every year to explore how to discuss and deal with those differences constructively.

That, they learn, is the fundamental challenge of diversity.

Since 2003, the Diversity Leadership Academy based out of Furman University's Riley Institute has annually drawn CEOs, non-profit presidents, mayors and other top officials from Anderson, Greenville and Spartanburg counties. These are the people, said the academy's assistant director Audrey Dodson, who can best quash prejudice and narrow thinking in institutions - from the top down.

"The most important thing that I took away from it was an acknowledgement that diversity doesn't just mean black and white," said Diane Eldridge, a Greenville environmental consultant who took part two years ago. "We have so many different nationalities here."

On Tuesday in Anderson, the acade-

my's annual Upstate Diversity Leadership Awards banquet recognized six individuals and organizations that are sensitive to diversity and have touched thousands of people across the region and abroad through their efforts.

Among the winners was a hospital CEO from Anderson, a Spanish-speaking Spartanburg college student, a trilingual high-school student from Greenville, a multi-national French corporation, a non-profit Greenville literacy group and a Mauldin-based grocery-store chain.

All share a mentality that understanding others starts with reaching out.

"It's getting out of a rut," said Russell Harris of Anderson, who along with Eldridge and other academy grads helped pick this year's winners. "Nothing says you have to accept diversity challenges."

Banquet guest speaker Joe Anderson, owner of automotive supplier TAG Holdings Inc., told the roughly 500 Upstate people attending the event about his own experiences, as a black man raised in Topeka, Kansas, during the era of Brown v. Board of Education (of Topeka). Anderson was one of four black students when he attended West Point Academy in the 1960s, and is now the owner of the 15th largest black-owned business in America.

He said a Korean man was running one of his plants in China when he took

over TAG. When he was told no Chinese workers were qualified to run the plant themselves, he started a management-training program for them.

"That's my value system. But guess what? It's my company," he said.

Harris said he's grown sensitive to recent discussions in the media about undocumented Hispanic workers that often doesn't explore where they are coming from and why they are here. Discussions of singing the national anthem in Spanish have been equally as shallow.

"I'll get teased by my family because I'll say something and they will say they want to send me back to the Diversity Leadership Academy," he said, laughing. "As hard as we try and as good as we think we are doing, we may never



Pete Wachsberger/Contributing photographer

**AWARD:** Wayne Culbertson of Michelin presents Elvia Pacheco with the 2006 Upstate Diversity Award for outstanding college achievement.

achieve a diverse mindset."

Winners of this year's Upstate Diversity Leadership Awards were:

- AnMed Health president John Miller for individual achievement. He was >

> chosen because of his work - three years before attending the Diversity Leadership Academy in 2003 - to establish an office of diversity at the hospital system. Among the hospital's more important programs is a 24-7 translator program.

A group of bilingual nurses, staff and community volunteers is always on call to interpret for the hospital's growing Spanish-speaking clientele. A translator hotline also is available for other languages.

- Mauldin-based Bi-Lo grocery-store chain for business achievement. It was chosen for its push to find minority suppliers, establish a mentoring program and fund a scholarship program in conjunction with the Urban League that helps 18 college freshmen each year.

"Bi-Lo is determined to become 'best in class' in the area of diversity for the grocery industry," according to a statement released about the award winners.

- Greenville-based Michelin North America for international achievement. Michelin has a decidedly global bent toward diversity, with a presence in 173 countries. Michelin North America requires intercultural training for all its employees in Canada, Mexico and the United States, and North American president Jim Micali is on the French corporation's executive committee, which established diversity as one of its core strategies.
- Greenville Literacy Association for

non-profit achievement. This is the largest literacy program in the state with 3,460 adults enrolled, got a nod for its efforts to help long-time residents and immigrants. The organization's English as a Second Language program helps people attain work skills, a high-school education and personal goals.

Almost 500 volunteers keep the program going in five learning centers around the county.

- Student awards went to Michael Youssef of Greenville's Southside High School and USC Upstate student Elvia Pacheco of Newberry.

Youssef, a first-generation American whose parents are from Egypt, is an active student who plays in the band and is student-body vice president and plans someday to be a doctor. He also speaks Arabic and French and organized a Passport Marathon this past year to help non-English speakers fill out applications.

"It was very successful," he said. "We helped about 250 people."

Pacheco, whose parents were born in Mexico, deals with diversity challenges daily as head resident assistant at USC Upstate and also was president of Hispanic Awareness. She was the school's homecoming queen and volunteers as a youth mentor and translator in Newberry. She also has participated in AmeriCorps and plans a career in entertainment and broadcasting.

Contact Anna B. Brutzman at 356-8183 or [abrutzman@greenvillejournal.com](mailto:abrutzman@greenvillejournal.com).