

Diversity proposals cover all sectors

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Seminar goers create projects for health care, education, business

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Participants in the Diversity Leadership Academy in the Upstate divided into five groups, then developed projects to help manage diversity in various settings.

The group members looked at more than race and gender. They looked at other diversity issues such as nationality, geographic background, education, age and the myriad other aspects of diversity.

The projects include:

- Building a Web site that "could tell a more correct story about Greenville," said Michelle Shain, Greenville City Council member. The site, www.greenvillediversity.com, was built free by MDI Inc., an Atlanta company, and is owned and operated by the Greater Greenville Chamber of Commerce. "I think nationally we continue to be on a negative radar screen," she said, citing such incidents as the Confederate flag controversy, the Martin Luther King holiday issue and others.

Companies interested in locating in Greenville, people thinking of moving here and others need a site where they can find diversity information in one location, she said.

- John Miller, chief executive officer of AnMed Health, said his group recognized the growing Latino population in the Upstate. While discussing that, health care was the issue that continued to be brought up.

The group is working with MedVerse to provide more cost-effective medical interpretation, primarily for hospitals but also in other health-care settings.

"It's an emerging problem in the Upstate. We're trying to get ahead of the curve," Miller said.

Juana Slade, who works with MedVerse, said it is rewarding for her organization, funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, to reap the benefits of working with members of the group. She said the problems with language barriers are not just medical but also economic because medical care may be inefficiently provided if communication is lacking.

- Mike Schultz, director of human resources, Coca-Cola Consolidated, said his group decided to work with an extremely diverse elementary school that was successfully handling many of its challenges. The group decided that Lake Forest Elementary's biggest diversity challenge was around the language barrier. It suggested a formalized sharing of the best practices throughout the district, recruiting and paying a premium salary for bilingual teachers and guidance counselors, expanding the Teaching English to Students of Other Languages programs and providing translation services for teacher-parent meetings.

- Rabbi James David Cohn of Temple of Israel said his group was trying to find ways the United Ministries, a successful group dealing with diverse clients, could become more efficient and effective. The recommendations are soon to be presented to the United Ministries board. However, the group generally suggested the organization find ways to better use staff and volunteer talents and capitalize on the differences as well as similarities to further its goals. The recommendations deal with communication, the totality of the organization's mission and relationships among programs.

"The commitment on the part of volunteers and staff is tremendous," he said.

- Bob Morris, executive director and president of the Community Foundation of Greater Greenville, said his group discussed how to make sure children transferring schools because of the No Child Left Behind Act are welcomed to their new schools. One suggestion it came up with is having parents "adopt" new parents and get them involved in the school. The group also plans to work with the Alliance for Quality Education to find ways of making the transition easier and more welcoming. It also wants to help parents figure out whether their children should make a change or stay in their current schools.

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