

NSBE overtakes STL

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By Andrew Fowler |

This past week and weekend, St. Louis was the center of the world for African-American engineers.

The 37th annual National Society of Black Engineers Convention brought 8,000 NSBE members to town, including professionals from a wide range of fields and students of all ages.

The convention, held Wednesday, March 23 through Sunday in downtown St. Louis at America's Center, set out to "engineer the gateway to success."

By all accounts, they succeeded.

One of many great moments at the convention came from NSBE's Executive Director Carl Mack. He made very plain the convention's value to its many Pre-College Initiative student participants.

"For the pre-college students, this event gives them the reason why you should take your education seriously," Mack said.

"You have recruiters looking for young, educated people. These young people are getting jobs here because they are selling their minds."

He then made a remarkable gesture on behalf of Brian Scott Allis, a student at Youngstown State University who attended the convention.

"Because Brian carried his weight, I'm going to help him the rest of the way," Mack said.

Mack then personally handed Allis' resume to Irene Kendall, the diversity officer for Apple Inc. – one of many recruiters in attendance – and introduced student and recruiter to talk about job opportunities.

Ronald Moore headed the convention's Pre-College Initiative programming and was instrumental in getting students from many area districts involved.

In one of countless events, Moore brought in four students from Northwest High School in the St. Louis Public School District to present their Emmett Till exhibit. This is the students' second year traveling with the exhibit to middle schools, colleges and events to enlighten people about the impact Till's death had on the Civil Rights Movement.

One of the presenters was senior Michael Washington, who attended the convention on Friday and plans to study engineering.

"Being here has been very inspirational," Washington said. "It's showing me the basics of being successful and how I want my future to look."

Washington is currently making the all-important college decision. He is looking at attending Jackson State University or Southern Illinois University in Carbondale.

In general, the convention's career fair provided an opportunity for NSBE members to network with a wide range of companies, including AT&T, Google, IBM, Intel, Johnson and Johnson, Proctor and Gamble, and many more.

Thomas Mensah, the inventor of fiber optics used in military aircraft, began the first African American-owned aerospace company, Georgia Aerospace. He is looking to hire talented NSBE members.

"We want people who are good in basic engineering, highly motivated and want to work very hard," Mensah said. "These are the people we think can be part of the innovation process."

Mensah won the Golden Torch Award, the highest achievement award given by NSBE, in 2007.

The convention featured seminars taught by successful NSBE members from companies like Dell Inc., Hewlett-Packard Company and Texas Instruments. There was special programming for technical professionals, college undergraduate students, graduate students and Pre-College Initiative students.

This was the first year that the U.S. Army was a sponsor for the convention. They hosted their own Army robotics interactive booth. They also worked closely with the Pre-College Initiative as judges for the Engineering Design Competition, a two-day competition where students worked in teams. The students' robots had to pass through an obstacle course, pick up a can and place it at particular spot in the course.

According to Army publicist Sandra Heath, the U.S. Army wants to connect African Americans to STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) fields.

"The thing that often our people miss is there was a time in history in which the military was our door to access middle-class life," Heath said. "And it was through the military that we could purchase our home and have great medical benefits."



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