

PROFESSIONALS CHAPTER OF THE YEAR

NSBE D.C. Earns Top Honors

BY KEVIN M. BRISCOE

Based on its stellar programs – ranging from mentoring to entrepreneurship – the National Society of Black Engineers Professionals, Washington, D.C. Metro Area Chapter was recognized as the National NBSE Professionals Chapter of the Year for 2013–14. This year’s honor, presented during NSBE’s 40th Annual Convention in Nashville this past March, is one in a long line of national accomplishments for the group.

“NSBE D.C. Professionals, formerly NSBE Alumni Extension D.C., has been active in the area since 1990,” says Paula Bennett, 26, a Columbia University-educated software developer with Booz Allen Hamilton, who served as chapter secretary during the last program year. “Upholding NSBE’s visionary spirit, the chapter has been recognized in the past as the 2000, 2001, 2009 and 2014 Chapter of the Year.”

Bennett adds that several chapter members have also been presented individual awards honoring their leadership skills.

“Our leadership is strong, driven, innovative and passionate about NSBE,” Bennett says.

The D.C. Metro Area chapter includes professionals in the science, technology, engineering and math disciplines, as well as members in affiliated fields. Many were allured by the career opportunities and excitement of the area.

“We are in a major metropolitan area that has a very high concentration of black technical professionals,” adds 2013–14 Chapter President Tolani Onigbanjo, 28, a project manager with Sikorsky Aircraft. “There are a number of major corporations situated in D.C., which allow us to do corporate outreach and get sponsorship of our chapter activities.”



“(Being a NSBE D.C. member) is beneficial, because we are able to serve a community of people who look just like us and look up to us as black technical professionals,” Onigbanjo adds. “We are able to network with like-minded individuals and build relationships and friendships that last a lifetime.”

Richard Ezike, Ph.D., a patent analyst with Landon IP, who was 2013–14 treasurer for the chapter, says he was

particularly drawn to the mentoring opportunities that come with being a member of NSBE D.C.

“There is no more involved organization (than NSBE) relating to the work they do in promoting STEM to underprivileged groups,” he says. “You have multiple opportunities to promote the excitement of your work to young people who may never even know what engineering is until you meet them.”

But, aside from its rich history of accomplishment and its prime location, NSBE D.C.’s programs are really what set it apart from its sister chapters. Through an array of offerings, such as professional development seminars, technical roundtable discussions, technical training and mentoring and placement services, the chapter remains true to its mission of increasing the number of industry professionals and technical students in the Maryland-D.C.-Northern Virginia area.

Specific chapter initiatives include:

- **Future Innovators Scholarship:** The chapter awards \$1,000 merit-based scholarships to graduating high school seniors who plan to pursue STEM-related degrees.
- **Annual Scholarship Benefit and Award Program:** This

signature event raises funds for the Future Innovators Scholarship and honors distinguished scientists and engineers in the community.

- The chapter invests in its membership by providing an **Executive Mentoring Program**, a monthly **Professional Development Speaker Series**, and numerous leadership opportunities on the Chapter Executive Board.



- **The Pre-College Initiative** participates in the USA Science and Engineering Festival to facilitate STEM-related activities for grade-school students.

“There is something here for everyone,” says Bennett. “We have leadership opportunities, community service initiatives, professional development training and a large network of high-achieving STEM professionals.”

Bennett offers a kind word of caution to NSBE Professionals chapters looking to emulate the successes of NSBE D.C.

“Provide value for members of your community, so that they can support your chapter,” she says. “What works for D.C. may not work for other cities, so customize your NSBE programs to fit your target audience.”

What’s next for NSBE D.C.?

Onibanjo and his administration, which also included Shelton Liddell, vice president; Karlynn Kerney, parliamentarian; and a host of committee chairs, has now turned over the leadership reins to past professional development chair and current President Yinka Ajiro-tutu and his new team of officers for the 2014–15 year, all of whom are dedicated to bringing in the 25th year of NSBE D.C. with a bang.

“The year will start off with a membership cookout, which will have the theme of a family reunion,” says Onigbanjo. “The chapter will also expand current program offerings and create new ones that cater to the entire NSBE D.C. demographic.”

The “bang” also includes hosting an Entrepreneurship Conference, a Tots to Teen Expo and a large capital campaign to establish an endowment to fund the Future Innovator Scholarship program. ■

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- The chapter’s College Initiative Committee works with area NSBE collegiate chapters to provide mentoring and access to potential employers through the **Collegiate Mentoring Program** and the **Corporate Mixer**.

(top) The D.C. chapter’s Pre-College Initiative Committee at the Future Innovator’s Scholarship Reception in June 2014

(above) Kevin Coby, Pioneer Award recipient (center), poses with NSBE D.C. chapter officers (left to right) Shelton Liddell, vice president; Tolani Onigbanjo, president; Paula Bennett, secretary; and Richard Ezike, treasurer, at the Annual Scholarship Benefit and Awards Jazz Brunch in April 2014.

(right) Chapter members at NSBE’s 40th Annual Convention in Nashville (March 2014)

