

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Dhana Donaldson
Tel: 513.344.6522
Email: dhanamse@gmail.com

Cincinnati, OH – September 2022) - On Friday, September 16, 2022, The Collective Empowerment Group (CEG) of Metro Cincinnati presented its 2022 Business Excellence Awards Gala. This sold-out event was sponsored by Fifth Third Bank returning as this year's Title Investment Sponsor. Additional Sponsors include First Financial Bank, Liberty Bank, Union Savings Bank and Guardian Savings Bank.

It was an evening of highlights and recognitions of not only the small businesses, but the CEG organization. The theme of the gala was "Building Business Resilience" which is a continuation of CEG's efforts to build thriving churches and businesses which contribute to a flourishing Metro Cincinnati. During the celebration, First Financial Bank was recognized as Corporation of the Year for their Engagement and new **WorkLIFE** Membership program that was recently added to CEG for its member churches and businesses.

CEG also celebrated and recognized New Vision United Methodist Church as CEG Member Church of the Year for their monumental efforts in doing business with not only CEG Strategic Partners, but also many small businesses throughout our community.

Seven (7) small African American businesses who are a part of the CEG Strategic Partner Program were celebrated and recognized for their resilience and thriving during the 2-year period of the COVID 19 pandemic. This year's honorees included:

Tier 1- \$3,000,000 and Above (2021 and 2020)

- Angelita Moreno Jones - Eastern Personnel
- Charles "Chuck" Futel, Jr. - Chuck Futel & Associates dba Primerica
- Sheila Holmes Howard—SHH Realty Group LLC dba Ownerland Realty

Tier 2 - \$1,000,000 and Above (2021 and 2020)

- JC Battle - JC Battle & Sons Funeral Home
- Anthony Dickerson - Goodies BBQ Restaurant
- Dhana Donaldson & Yvonne Brown - Tri-City Staffing Services LLC

Tier 3 - \$500,000 and Above (2021 and 2020)

- Simone Charles - Social Butterfly Events and Designs dba The Confetti Room
- Jeremy Sibert - Clearview Construction Company LLC

These seven (7) small businesses had a total of \$23,094,516.00 in sales during the specified timeframe. This is Business Resilience!



An evening of highlights included CEG's President, Rev. Dr. Paul Booth Jr. Ph.D. along with CEG's Bank Black Initiative Committee being joined by Executives from Liberty Bank and Trust to share their exciting announcement. Ann Duplessis, Senior Vice President of Retail Banking, Marketing & Sales, and Strategic Planning was joined with Wendy Ryce-Smith, Vice President, and Retail/Commercial Director Liberty Bank and Robert Lay, Assistant Vice President of Mortgage helped share in the announcement.

Liberty Bank is the largest African American owned bank in the country with over \$1 Billion in assets under management. CEG is the convening sponsoring organization who has led this project in bringing Liberty Bank to Cincinnati. *According to Rev. Dr. Paul Booth, Jr. "This is a culmination of the important work and vision of CEG both locally and nationally. CEG's early history of addressing flawed banking policies for minority communities is now being positively addressed. A new African American financial institution coming to the city will have far reaching impact for the City of Cincinnati and the surrounding region."*

With the huge support of Fifth Third Bank and the City of Cincinnati, Liberty Bank and trust should be online in 2023. *According to Royce Sutton, Senior Vice President, Fifth Third Bank, "Bringing a Black-owned financial institution to Cincinnati, along with community stakeholders, embodies the focus of Fifth Third Bank's Empowering Black Futures neighborhood program. Fifth Third is excited to be a part of this transformative effort to create economic mobility and neighborhood vitality."* During this special announcement, Ann Duplessis and Liberty Bank Representatives also presented Collective Empowerment Group with a \$15,000 Sponsorship check. At the end Ohio State Representative Sedrick Denson then presented a proclamation to Todd McDonald, the new President of the Largest Black Owned Bank in the Country.

The Keynote Speaker for the evening was Rev. Dr. Deforest Soaries, Jr. who has served as the Senior Pastor (Emeritus) of the First Baptist Church of Lincoln Gardens in Somerset, New Jersey from November 1990 to July 2021. He has held historic and noteworthy government positions. He served as New Jersey's 30th Secretary of State making him the first African American male to serve as a Constitutional officer of the State. He served as a senior advisor to the governor on issues that transcended traditional departmental lines. Dr. Soaries is also the former chairman of the United States Election Assistance Commission. Dr. Soaries speech was like no other. Guest stood their feet and not only erupted in laughter, shouts and cheers throughout the speech, but they were also left empowered to make change. The night ended with Dr. Soaries being presented with a Proclamation for his religious and community leadership.



In attendance were CEG Member Churches, Strategic Partners, as well as potential member churches and strategic partners who are looking forward to becoming members of Collective Empowerment Group. Additionally, Vice Mayor Jan Michele Lemon Kearney, Hamilton County Commissioner Alicia Reece, Former Ohio State Senator and African American Chamber President, Eric Kearney, Kenneth Parker, 45th United States Attorney for the Southern District of Ohio, Members of City Council and host of State Representatives and Judges came to join in on the experience.

Entertainment was provided by Mike Wade and the Mighty Groovers, Revolution Dance Theatre and the CEG Chorale lead by P. Ann Everson Price. Many thanks to Event Coordinator Dhana Donaldson of MainStage Events and her events management team which included, Program Manager Erica Garrett, Simone Charles of Social Butterfly Events, Stage Manager Shawnise Lewis and a host of volunteers for their planning efforts.