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Business community to discuss diversity at development week

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Business professionals from throughout the Big Bend are meeting in Tallahassee this week for a series of workshops and events during 2007 Minority Enterprise Development Week.

The event is being sponsored by the city of Tallahassee and the Big Bend Minority Enterprise Development Week committee, which includes state and local agencies. Today's events continue at 9 a.m. with a workshop titled "The Price of Bidding" at the Tallahassee Community College Economic Workforce Development Building, 444 Appleyard Drive.

A luncheon Friday at the Civic Center will end the week and include a speech by Brenda Jarmon, associate professor and chair of the Department of Social Work at Florida A&M University. The committee will honor Cory McFarlane of Aspirant Homes as the Reginald L. Rolle Economic Development Champion Of The Year. Eddie Lee Randolph of Randolph's Alterations & Drycleaning will receive the 2007 Minority Business Legend award.

To qualify as a minority enterprise, 51 percent of a business based in Leon, Gadsden, Jefferson or Wakulla counties must be owned and operated by a woman or minority. Women and minority-owned businesses in Florida accounted for \$59.4 billion in gross receipts in 2002, according to the most recent statistics available from the Minority Business Development Agency.

"Minority businesses have become more entrenched in the regular makeup of the community," said Ben Harris. "In that regard doing business with minorities is becoming more of a norm rather than the exception."

Harris, administrator of the city's Minority Business Enterprise, has worked for 20 years to develop minority businesses in the area. He said there are about 200 businesses that are members of the Minority Business Enterprise.

Gary Johnson, director of the county's Minority, Women & Small Business Enterprise, said events like Minority Enterprise Development Week are important because it highlights, women and minority businesses while training them to better compete.

"One of the barriers to minority-related businesses is the big conglomerates," Johnson said. "They are affecting the small and minority business at the same time ... and people tend to gravitate toward the conglomerates."