

Little ^{by} Little

PURPOSE | PROCESS | PROGRESS

Good News, South Carolina Contractors!



*It was March 18. Anthony Cromartie and W. C. Benton crossed Hard Scrabble Road searching for pipelines that channel the flow of water from Rice Creek to Lake Carolina. Pamela Foster offered her hand to help Linda McHenry as McHenry struggled to walk through the mud at Rice Creek. Juanita Campbell and Stephen Smith stood sentry and were nearby in a South Carolina Department of Transportation vehicle that carried the party of six who made up the agency's EDIP team. March 18 was one of seven planning sessions leading up to SCDOT's Entrepreneurial Development Institute Program. Early on the team was of one mind: **Help DBEs become more competitive in the highway construction industry.***



Meet W.C. Benton and Linda McHenry as they present *Advancing DBE Supportive Services Programs to the Next Level* at the **Southern Transportation Civil Rights Executive Council Training Symposium** August 21, 2019, 9:45 AM–11:15 AM.





Fast forward to April 21. A large black Mercedes Sprinter headed for Columbia, South Carolina from the mythical state of Indyland drove through the I-40 tunnel at the Great Smoky Mountains in Haywood County, North Carolina. The view was spectacular and even more breathtaking

on a beautiful Easter Sunday. Known as the Fire Bus, the Sprinter was driven by the Happyness Squad, imaginary friends, Cool Beans, Sunny B. Shine, and Dassa Blaine. Benton & Associates' team members, W. C. Benton, Linda McHenry, and Jacqueline Bingham snoozed along the way. Indyland, an oasis for learning, is a mythical state in the center of Ohio, Indiana, and Kentucky. Along the way, they picked up team members, Joe Girard, Fabian Tan, Adrian Tan, Rick Murdock, and Earl Milligan. It was a journey. Around 11:00 PM the Fire Bus carrying the Benton team arrived at the Homewood Suites in Columbia where they would present SCDOT's long awaited EDIP.

from around the world, checked into Columbia hotels and made the daily trip to Augusta for the Masters Tournament.

Cool, Sunny, and Dassa swept the streets of Columbia with star dust, rolled out the red carpet of opportunity at the apex of the Carolina Crossroads, and hung colorful banners and signs throughout the streets of Columbia. The Squad hid small treasures from Indyland throughout the city—Buckeyes, Ohio State football Rose Bowl hats, Stauf's coffee, Kentucky Derby memorabilia, and Kentucky Bourbon Balls. Vases filled with Carolina Jessamine adorned the tables. It was a fitting celebration! Twenty-five years after Benton & Associates' Regional EDI, 15 years since Benton & Associates' last South Carolina program, four months of intense preparation, days after Tiger Woods' historic win at the Masters, finally, the crown jewel of this trifecta of celebrated events—NCAA, the Masters Tournament, EDIP—was set to begin.

The program message, *Little by Little*, was culled from the scriptures as the Lord told the Israelites that in due time they would find the Promised Land. The comprehensive theme, Little by **Little: Purpose, Process, Progress**, captured the mettle of development for South Carolina's Disadvantaged Business Enterprises.

- **Purpose** focused on helping DBE participants unearth their individual missions and unique talents.
- **Process** showed the operational systems that DBEs must put in place to deliver SCDOT projects on time, under budget, and within specifications.
- **Progress** is the advancement that firms experience as they implement systems to manage and analyze their business performance.



One month before EDIP, Columbia hosted the first and second rounds of the NCAA Division I Men's Basketball Tournament. With two number one seeds, Duke and Virginia, folks from across the region came from far and wide. Spartanburg's Zion Williamson was a huge draw. Virginia would go on to win the Final Four; those who witnessed Virginia beat Oklahoma in Columbia were impressed. Two weeks after the NCAA, golf enthusiasts

Welcome to EDIP!





There is nothing like a gathering of South Carolina contractors! Several weeks before EDIP, **Rosendo Manuel**, CKRE, told McHenry that he could arrive at the program at 7:30 AM. McHenry replied, Rosendo, the class doesn't start until 11:45 AM. *Whatever!* A member of the original Regional EDI class, **Ronald Taylor**, Taylor Brothers Construction, was excited. Benton's maxim "bid not to get a job" has stayed with Taylor for 25 years. When another member of the original class, Naomi Garrett, Gray Court Contracting, heard about 2019 EDIP, she told her senior vice-president, **LaVonna Garrett**, "you're going to that!" **Keven Manning**, Manning & Sons Trucking, wore a shirt with his company motto: *The Road to Success is Always Under Construction*. Sweet! Manning's motto



dovetails with Benton & Associates' corporate slogan: *The Secrets Are in You*.



SCDOT brass **Greg Davis**, Director of Minority and Small Business Affairs; **Anthony Cromartie**, Director of Supportive Services & Business Development; Stephen Smith, Financial Program Coordinator; and Juanita Campbell, Administrative Coordinator joined with **Pamela Foster**, Civil Rights Program Manager, FHWA, South Carolina to greet DBEs as they arrived at the Homewood Suites. Armed with their group assignments, DBEs met their fellow team members and for four days began the process of transforming their individual identities to new EDIP



"companies" and forging friendships that will last forever.

PURPOSE
PROCESS
PROGRESS



As EDIP class members entered the classroom, they were in awe. In the main corner of the room was a magnificent imposing sign that rained down like a lighted waterfall reading *Little by Little: Purpose, Process Progress*. Tall oversized messaging banners dwarfed the rectangular tables that were lined with program manuals. Another large lighted sign intrigued DBEs. It read: *Velocity: Business at the Speed of Light*. An exhibit of safety equipment including personal flotation vests, steel-toed shoes, ANSI approved hard hats, safety glasses, Class 3 safety vests, and an elaborate harness system was displayed in the classroom.

McHenry kicked off the program with thanks and gratitude to SCDOT and FHWA and her signature: *Good News! It is a great day in South Carolina! Good Morning South Carolina Contractors! There are no secrets to success, but at EDIP we will help you develop a few secrets of your own. The secrets are in you!*

In Indyland, McHenry would have also proclaimed: *Contractors start your engines!* But, because this is Columbia, home of the Carolina Crossroads, there was no better way to begin than with a presentation by **David**

Rister, SCDOT Mega Projects Construction Manager, on the subject at hand, the 1.5 Billion Carolina Crossroads. The project is designed to improve mobility and enhance traffic operations by reducing existing traffic congestion within the I-20/26/126 corridor. With a project goal of 12%, DBEs will need to respond expeditiously and do their best work.

Find Your Purpose

What motivated you to start your business? What is your mission and reason for being? What is your vision? International scholar, author, and university professor, Dr. W. C. Benton discussed his three seminal Ground Rules: *Foundations for Success*, *Operational Excellence*, and the *People Rules*. The main pillars of the Foundations are finding the contractor's unique talents and activation. Too many individuals are unable to convert their talents into a commercial purpose and then activate their missions. Operational Excellence is fostered by continuous improvement and supply chain relationships. DBEs must get better with each project that they build. SCDOT Director Davis adeptly added to the conversation: *Continuous improvement is better than delayed perfection!*



This synergistic growth model informed by both the *Foundations for Success* and *Operational Excellence* will help DBEs to develop themselves and their organizations. Valuable lessons on adversity from the movie, *The Pursuit of Happyness*, reinforced Benton's Ground Rules. Persevere and never give up! Purge yourself of negative people who do not share your vision. Adjust your attitude! The business owner must believe so that others can see, while at the same time be accountable for his or her actions. Accountability involves leadership, vision, and ownership. In short, DBEs must create their own success reality.

Benton observed that adversity ignites thinking! In his three-point thinking model based on the scientific method, Benton encouraged participants to choose an alternative solution to a problem to see which alternative is better. Do a business plan or make a quick analysis. Don't execute and invest resources until there is a good plan. Do thinking and research before going forward to the implementation phase.

Develop a Process

Process is the methods, strategies, and systems needed to implement a firm's purpose. The fulfillment of the construction process—on time, under budget, within specifications—is the cornerstone of the highway contractor's business organization. Benton introduced the project delivery system or process with a case study: the Allen and Gary Show. Using historical bid results, DBEs were required to compare and analyze the performance of two firms in the same market. Put another way, DBEs deconstructed performance data from the Allen and Gary companies to evaluate the efficacy of their business processes and practices. The team reports were thoughtful and their solutions addressed the gamut of issues raised in Allen and Gary. *What were the strengths and weaknesses of each company? Can overhead be reduced? How many jobs does Allen have to bid to win one job? Is the work profitable? Are management wages too high?* Moreover, as they developed solutions for Allen and Gary, the teams bonded, quickly showed their personalities, and threw down their competitive gauntlets for the estimating practicum.

About Those Teams...



Led by **Sally Paul**, original Regional EDI class member, Clemson engineer, and company matriarch—I'm Sally—**All IN** waltzed to the front of the classroom with an imposing company logo adorned with Tiger paws. **Tarra Bell** unabashedly carried All IN's custom sign; it was in no way subtle and a flat out tribute to the Clemson Tigers. No she didn't! The USC loyalists in the classroom—South Carolina and Southern California—were aghast. All IN team member, **Betty Price**, USC graduate, gave a split opinion. The men in her family went to Clemson; the women are USC graduates. But, for four days, Price was All IN. Rosendo Manuel, the team's project manager, was as they say, All IN. Things were out of control. Special guest,



Janet Hayes, FHWA Atlanta Resource Center, was amused. The Happyness Squad had to be summoned to curb the laughter and joy. Cromartie smiled. He likened the painstaking exercise of assigning 20 class members to four diversified groups undertaken by the EDIP management team to the NFL Draft!



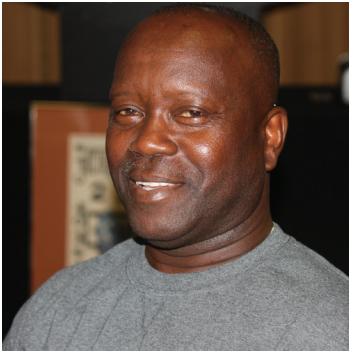
Greystone Construction

Much like All IN, Clemson was in the house at **Greystone Construction**. Clemson graduate, Kelly Boulware and her fellow team members, Edgar Pena, Stephanie Smith, Rosetta Harris, and Keven Manning, were more practical than creative. They took the name Greystone right from the street sign in front of the Homewood Suites, 230 Greystone Boulevard. Duh! Boulware's real life firm, Southern Concrete & Construction, is an actual subcontractor on the Hard Scrabble Road project. The team tied into Pena's impressive background in highway construction. Pena is a big picture thinker and wants all of Greystone's employees to own their homes. During the site visit to Hard Scrabble Road, Smith checked out the silt fence installed around the shoreline at Crane Creek. Her non-stop high wattage smile is an inspiration! Harris' attention to customer service and detail honed at Earth Movers, a respected trucking firm, are qualities that will add bona fides to Greystone's portfolio.





Motivated by the Carolina Jessamine arrangements, Ronald Taylor, **Lynn Blizzard**, **Louis Williams**, LaVonna Garrett, and **Anna Davis**, chose the name **Jasmine Construction**.



Blizzard's pink hard hat captured her happiness; she meets no strangers! Her move from a large corporation back to the family business has served her firm well. Louis Williams brings a strong work ethic to Jasmine. He is always at work before 8:00 am even on Saturday morning. Louis gladly enrolled in EDIP because for him knowledge is power! LaVonna Garrett and Williams both work long hours. To be fresh for EDIP,



Garrett took an evening off April 18 to see Casting Crowns in concert. Anna Davis, who is transforming her unique talents to grow and manage a dump truck business, was grateful for the opportunity to learn and be a part of the highly experienced team. Jasmine's experience is overflowing! Taylor's fourth generation firm is the oldest African American owned business in the state of South Carolina.

Was it adapting to change and innovation or an identity crisis? Team members, Dianne Rushing, Carlos Irving, Debra Pearson, Christine Harris, and Kenneth Boyles did a 360 degree turn in 24 hours. On the second day of EDIP the group changed their name



Wearing the pink Kentucky Derby hats are Great Horizons team members, front and center, Dianne Rushing, and left to right, Christine Harris, Kenneth Boyles, Debra Pearson, and Carlos Irving.

from Financial Clarity to **Great Horizons**. What's up with that? From her long view at 50,000 feet above the ground, Rushing's passion is only surpassed by her vision...hence the name horizons. Before she started Seaside Trucking, Chrissy Harris earned her stripes as a manager and whiz at customer service in a competitive retail environment. She understands how to build relationships. Irving brings a spiritual outlook to Great Horizons. He believes that if you keep your faith in God and continue to pursue your goals, no one can stand in your way as you seek to accomplish your dreams. Pastor Debra Pearson shares Irving's faith and Rushing's long view. Her kindness and ethereal qualities are abundant! Boyles tenure in the construction industry has been filled with zeniths and high points as well as labyrinth and difficult passages. He is often reminded of what his father would say: Listen now; hear me later. Boyles has been as Benton says: *Through the Fire to the Wealth*. Great Horizons, onward and upward!



With lines of demarcation drawn, the teams ramped up for the Estimating Practicum. Benton & Associates instructors, Girard and Tan, introduced



the class to the Hard Scrabble Road project. The project was composed of 40 items of work including removal of various structures, driving pile, concrete, steel, approach slabs, etc. Visualization is

critical in the estimating process! To become familiar with the project, the class surveyed the plans for the new bridge at Rice Creek and the widening of lanes over Crane Creek. *Can the contractor use stay-in-place bridge forms at Rice Creek? On what pages do you find the details for the underdrains and the bridge rail? How long is the Crane Creek Bridge? How many spans? Are there any drainage grates on the bridge sidewalks?* Tan demonstrated the appropriate personal protective equipment to wear on the site. He noted that the correct hard hat must be ANSI Z 89.1.





Visualization is critical—we can’t say that enough—in the estimating process! Armed with a good background on the bridge sections of Hard Scrabble Road and specifics on what to look for on the project site visit, the properly outfitted class boarded a yellow school bus to travel to Rice Creek. Staying close with their team members and newly minted companies, DBEs explored the site with curiosity. They observed the flow of water from Rice Creek on one side and Lake Carolina on the opposite side. The SCDOT and Palmetto construction managers met the group at Rice Creek and updated the class on SCDOT’s decision to not remove the pipes.

The class traveled down Hard Scrabble to Crane Creek where the bridge modification was already underway. A crane was in place on a makeshift platform. Later, Instructor Fabian Tan discussed crane safety and the harsh reality of the differences between incidents, hazards, and accidents. Tan’s video clips of construction accidents where human error, short cuts, and bad judgment resulted in personal injuries, fatalities, and property damage were sobering.



As with any regular SCDOT letting, the frenzy and anticipation prior to the bid opening was high for DBEs attending EDIP. The night before prodigy Dr. Adrian Tan had gone from team to team assisting class members with their Excel spreadsheets. Benton emphasized that the Estimating Practicum is a learning experience designed to lead to a better understanding of the SCDOT market... *Process!* The judges awarded the project to All IN! They developed their price based on several inputs including internal job costs records of similar projects. All IN showed an impressive understanding of the project, how to build it and the sequencing of various operations.

Progress is Purpose and Process Realized!



Progress involves measurement. *How can a contractor's capabilities be extended and transformed so that the contractor can enter new work categories and markets?* The

Estimating Practicum provided an ideal segue to Benton & Associates' presentation on overhead. A good estimate includes many costs, direct labor, direct materials, equipment, and profit. **Instructor Murdock** noted that it is important that DBEs understand the relationship between these direct costs and overhead. Overhead distributes indirect cost across revenue producing projects using one of three elements: direct labor, direct materials, or equipment usage. For example overhead could be calculated as 150% of direct labor costs.

The ultimate goal is to determine how much work the contractor needs by some percentage to cover the indirect costs that are incurred to operate the company but that can't be charged directly to the job.

Managing by the numbers begins with communications between the accountant and the business owner to determine the information needed to make decisions that lead to profitability. The owner must decide what is important in their operation so that they can decide to collect data that reports individual actions and specific activities. This is the basis for choosing the accounts that make up a firm's chart of accounts.



Murdock rounded out the segment with a discussion on succession. There are several considerations when DBEs are ready to sell their firms. The most important factors are planning and not waiting too long to sell. Benton's model to resolve the succession dilemma is for DBEs to have an exit strategy that is a section within their business plans.

In his closing remarks, Benton said ***"Change is good!"*** He told class members not to think about the past. He told them that we live in two dimensions, now and the future. Customers must be inspired to use a DBE's services. The reality is that DBEs should market every minute. Ultimately, DBEs must differentiate themselves and redefine the missions of their firms every year. Benton left participants with his classic proverb: *The ability to achieve any goal is absolutely contingent upon the quality of your mind.*



Eighty-five participants, including Yolonda Jordan, Assistant Division Administrator, FHWA South Carolina, attended the capstone Identity Leadership seminar presented by international celebrity, best selling author, educator, and entrepreneur, **Stedman Graham**. Graham told the audience that human beings operate in a box. Our titles, jobs, skin color, gender, and class define us. This “box” sets individual expectations and limits one’s potential.

Graham challenged the participants to progress from a follower to an owner of their own development. Everyone is equal because everyone has the same 24 hours. He told the group to create their own system for success. The key to the learning process is to focus on what you do well. Organize everything around your purpose in life and what you love. Create a picture of where you want to be. Who do you want to become? Transcend race, gender, and assimilate in the global market with love.

Graham shared his ***nine-step process for success*** that includes having a vision and building relationships. Graham concluded with his remarks on a resounding note with readings from the poem, ***The Race***.



The Race

For all of life is like that race, with ups and downs and all.

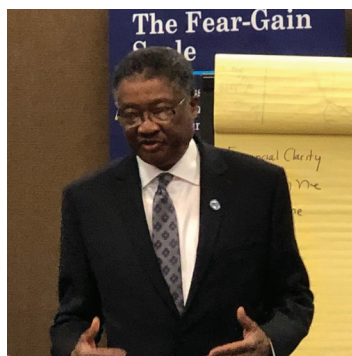
And all you have to do to win is rise each time you fall.

And when depression and despair shout loudly in my face,

Another voice within me says, “Get up and win that race!”



Graduation day featured a high scoring competitive retention game, Little by Little, with Pamela Foster as the celebrity host. Foster charmed participants with a Vanna White style entry and an Alex Trebek delivery. At the end of two rounds and a bonus question, All IN and Greystone were tied 3,300 to 3,300. The teams faced off with a flip of a coin. All IN was declared the winner!



The commencement speaker was the South Carolina Transportation Commission, **At-Large Commissioner, J. T. McLawhorn.** Commissioner McLawhorn's

remarks explained the program theme, Little by Little, so well that it seemed as though the Commissioner had been a participant in the class for the entire week. Commissioner McLawhorn said DBEs must be able to do the work. He warned against allowing hurt and disappointment to define you. And, most importantly, the Commissioner challenged DBEs to build relationships. In a moving

conclusion, Commissioner McLawhorn quoted Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. *"If you can't fly, then run. If you can't run, then walk. If you can't walk, crawl. But whatever you do, keep moving forward!"*

Hello! Full circle...Pursuit of Happyness, Benton's 3 Ground Rules, Identity Leadership, the messages converge! ***Little by Little! Purpose, Process, Progress!***



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EDIP IS PRESENTED BY:

W. C. Benton & Associates

SPONSORED BY:

The South Carolina Department of Transportation

The Federal Highway Administration

One seed grows many flowers.

Purpose is the seed for your business.

EDIP is the process for developing the seed.

Growth is progress.

Plant the seed.





*In Memory of Trudy Crosby,
Loving Sister of Mary and Joe Girard*

There are
No Secrets
to Success

WC BENTON & ASSOCIATES