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200 Twin Cities Black Leaders you should know (the 1st 50)

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Jacqueline Prins | MSPBJ

Black leaders you should know

To commemorate Black History Month, the Minneapolis/St. Paul Business Journal is highlighting 200 Black leaders in the Twin Cities region, starting this week and running through February.

Editors of the Business Journal, assisted by a team of well-connected community and business leaders, started this project

with a goal of featuring 100 Twin Cities Black leaders in business, government, advocacy, community work and other sectors who our readers need to know. With the help of our advisers, we quickly reached 200 people worthy of listing here. We are revealing their names over four weeks in print and online, starting today. (We didn't receive responses to an emailed survey from everyone, but they deserve mention nonetheless.)

Beyond featuring these business and community leaders themselves, we've asked them to share the locally based Black-owned businesses they celebrate and support.

Why are we doing this? Two reasons:

The Business Journal has long been committed to highlighting the diversity of our business community, and we doubled down on that effort after the murder of George Floyd, devoting even more resources to raising up Black business leaders and entrepreneurs who have often been marginalized in Minnesota's predominantly white business community. And we believe we can always do more on this front.

Our broader company's mission is to help our customers "grow their business, advance their career and simplify their professional life." Helping our readers develop and nurture a diverse network of contacts — across industries and community activities — falls squarely under that mission.

We want to thank our unpaid consultants on this project for their passionate support:

Shelley Carthen Watson, CEO, YWCA Minneapolis

B Kyle, president and CEO, St. Paul Area Chamber of Commerce

Kristie Lazenberry, DEI Collaborative Program Director, St. Area Paul Chamber of Commerce

Ravi Norman, chair and CEO, Sagiliti

Please visit the links below to learn more about our first cohort of Black leaders:

Thompson Aderinkomi, Nice Healthcare

Khadija Ali, Global Language Connections

Kelly Baker, Thrivent

Chris Brooks, Brown Venture Group

Frank Brown, Minuteman Press Uptown
Sheletta Brundidge, ShelettaMakesMeLaugh.com
Tyrre Burks, Players Health
Justin Butler, Bremer Financial Corp.
Angela Conley, Hennepin County commissioner
Tiffani Daniels, Minnesota Business Coalition for Racial Equity
Paul Edlund, J. Benson Construction
Gloria Freeman, Olu's Home Inc.
Darrel German, Huntington Bancshares Inc.
Sacad Guled, Coherent Bus Co.
Dr. David Hamlar, University of Minnesota Medical School
Duchess Harris, Macalester College
Olivia Jefferson, UnitedHealthcare
Cheniqua Johnson, Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation
Brandon Jones, Minnesota Association for Children's Mental Health
Tameka Jones, Lip Esteem
Kristie Lazenberry, St. Paul Area Chamber of Commerce
Mercedes McFarland Jackson, Fredrikson & Byron
Warren McLean, Northside Economic Opportunity Network
Miquel McMoore, kpCompanies
Kentalé Morris Sr., 100 Black Men of the Twin Cities Inc.
Alan Page, Page Education Foundation
Simon Shannon, 3M Co.
Meka White Morris, Minnesota Twins
Tracey Williams-Dillard, Minnesota Spokesman-Recorder
Joffrey Wilson, M.A. Mortenson Co.

Additional Black leaders you should know:

Abdirahman Abdi, chief financial officer of Hennepin Health, a health care organization that integrates traditional medical services, behavioral health services, and other county and community services that address the social influencers of health
Siyad Abdullahi, president and CEO of The Language Banc, a company he founded in 2006 that specializes in interpretation and translation services, particularly for the health care, government, legal and education sectors
Marc Belton, retired General Mills Inc. executive vice president who founded Minneapolis business consultancy Wisefellows Consulting in 2015 and serves on a number of boards, including The Salvation Army and Minnehaha Academy

Karl Benson, executive director of One2One, an organization developing school-based mentoring programs in the Twin Cities; a board member of 100 Black Men, Twin Cities; past president and CEO of the Minnesota Black Chamber of Commerce

Eric Black, president and CEO of Minnesota Diversified Industries, a nonprofit manufacturer that focuses on providing jobs for people with disabilities, since spring 2021

Trent Bowman, vice president, community impact manager at Bremer Financial Corp., and a member of the GroundBreak Coalition, a group of local leaders working to advance racial equity across the Twin Cities through access to capital for home ownership, rental housing, commercial development and BIPOC entrepreneurship

Barbara Butts Williams, executive dean, external relations and partnerships, and dean emerita of business at Capella University, as well as a board member for Allina Health and Home Federal Savings Bank

Melvin Carter, mayor of St. Paul

Alfonso Cornish II, general partner at gener8tor, a venture capital firm and startup accelerator, as well as a basketball coach for Wayzata High School

Dondi Edwards, senior vice president, Wells Fargo Home Lending Diverse Segments - Economic Impact and Growth, and a member of the GroundBreak Coalition

Shawntera Hardy, co-founder and chief culture officer at Civic Eagle, a political technology startup whose flagship product, Enview, is a platform for government affairs and advocacy groups that makes searching legislative records easier

Damaris Hollingsworth, CEO of Design by Melo, an architectural and urban design firm she launched in 2019 to support real estate development projects that make the community more inclusive and sustainable

Dr. Julia Joseph-Di Caprio, former senior vice president and chief medical officer for UCare, now president and founder of Leap Pediatric and Adolescent Care, a St. Paul-based nonprofit pediatric and adolescent practice focused on advancing health equity and removing barriers to health and wellness

Michelle Miller, member of the Twin Cities Diversity in Practice board of directors, and recently retired as vice president and chief counsel in employment law for Medtronic after 26 years

Sondra Samuels, president and CEO of North Minneapolis-based Northside Achievement Zone, a collaborative of over 30 nonprofits and schools focused on ending multigenerational poverty through education and family stability

Cecilia Stanton Adams, co-founder and president of Crystal-based The Diversity Institute, an educational organization dedicated to training and coaching diversity, equity and inclusion practitioners, professionals and champions; previously held DEI leadership roles at Allianz Life, Buffalo Wild Wings, Rasmussen College and more

Laysha Ward, executive vice president and chief external engagement officer at Target Corp.; also serves on numerous boards, including the Northside Achievement Zone, the Minnesota Orchestra, and Greater MSP; and is a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc. and The Links Inc.

Wenda Weekes Moore, philanthropist, board memberships have included: regent, University of Minnesota; trustee, W.K. Kellogg Foundation; member, Ms. Foundation for Women; member, Association of Black Foundation Executives; member, Women's Funding Network; member, Graywolf Press


Sydney Wittmier, senior project manager at real estate developer M.A. Mortenson Co., as well as a board member for The Family Partnership, a Minneapolis-based organization working to close opportunity and achievement gaps for children and families living in poverty

Luther Wynder, CEO of Minnesota Valley Transit Authority

Check back at MSPBJ.com in the coming weeks as we feature more business and community leaders in this four-part series.

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