Black business succeeds

La. near top in number of black-owned enterprises

Sean McNally
States News Service

WASHINGTON — Only five states have more African-American-owned businesses than Louisiana, says the U.S. Department of Commerce.

In a new study by the Census Bureau, Louisiana has 25,800 African-American-owned businesses or 8.7 percent of all businesses in the state. Local businessmen and officials cannot confirm any increase in the number of African-American business owners. But they see that black businesses are succeeding in Louisiana.

Tyrone Bonvillain, owner of Pioneer Plus Janitorial Services in Houma, said he sees an increase in African-American businesses.

Bonvillain also said that it's hard for an African-American to succeed in business in the state. Local businesses and officials cannot confirm any increase in the number of African-American business owners. But they see that black businesses are succeeding in Louisiana.

Daphane Daigre, center, one of the owners of A Special Touch, helps customers Joann Landry, left, and her daughter Andrea Landry pick out a prom dress.

Black business owners: Planning is the key

Sonja Sherrer
Staff Writer

LAFAYETTE — Claude Krause said he and nine friends wanted to start a business. They formed an investment company, Metro World Trading Co. The number of members dropped to seven, but they all paid dues to purchase shares in the company. They paid for four years.

Then, in the fifth year, they began the process of opening their business. Today it's the Evangeline Creole Coffee House on the bottom floor of the old Evangeline Hotel on Jefferson Street. And it's one of 28,500 black-owned businesses in Louisiana, about 8.7 percent of all businesses in the state, according to a Census Bureau study.

“This means jobs and economic strength for the African-American community and also the community at large,” said Eric Singleton, president of the Lafayette Black Chamber of Commerce.
Planning

Commerce and Kinchen Funeral Home.

Local African-American business owners say the key to success in owning a business is knowing how to do what Krause and his friends did — plan.

Merline Herbert, owner of Creole Lunch House restaurant on 12th Street, said her 18 years of success also started with a plan. It took her, husband Raymond, and sons Jason and Raymond Jr. a year to plan the opening of their restaurant. She said the family saved money to get things running.

“The only problems I faced were the hard work and long hours. But overall, we have been really lucky,” Herbert said.

Although some businesses survive, Singleton believes that there is a need for more programs to explain how to plan for a business, how to get money and how to maintain the business.

Rose Nabors and Ray Winters, who have owned Creole Fried Chicken Restaurant on North University in Carencro for nine months, said they didn’t have any guidance in starting their business.

“There aren’t enough attainable programs to help get started. We were not given guidelines and directions that we needed to start,” Winters said.

He said that although they are succeeding now, the estimated $25,000 they saved to start the business may not keep their business running.

“It’s rough either way you look at it,” said Robert Russell, owner of Professional Cleaners and Drapery Service Inc. on South Sterling Street for 11 years. “There are ups and downs with everything, but if you do good work, customers will come to your business.”

Enterprises

area. He recalls that in his nearly two decades of operation, he has employed as many as 20 or 30 employees but he currently only has seven or eight on his payroll.

According to the Louisiana Department of Economic Development, the state has had a “strong push” to increase the number of minority businesses. Included in this push, the official said, were several laws passed to give minorities an advantage, especially in the area of garnering government contracts.