

Blue Ribbon Commission

Reducing Racial Employment Disparities

Blue Ribbon Commission Members

Elizabeth Walker Anderson, J.D., is the System Director, Cross Cultural Services, at HealthEast Care System in Saint Paul, MN. Anderson has leadership for a wide range of responsibilities related to culturally responsive care and organizational diversity. Throughout her professional career, Anderson has been actively involved with community and volunteer activities including legislative task forces and service on a variety of community boards.

Atum Azzahir is the Founder, President and Executive Director of the 15 year-old Minneapolis and St. Paul Cultural Wellness Centers. She is currently a member of the Board of Directors of the Hennepin County Medical Center and the Canadian based Community Campus Partnerships for Health.

Keith A. Baker manages the Consultant Contract Administration Section for MN/DOT Metro District, and has performed in this capacity since 2003. In 2000, until his current assignment, Baker served as Assistant Director for the Office of Equal Employment Opportunity/Contract Management. Hired in 1997, prior responsibilities within MN/DOT included development of and technical support to Metro District diversity efforts, which involved recruitment, training, and implementation of diversity strategies. Keith Baker served as Executive Director of the W. Harry Davis Leadership Institute, worked for the City of Minneapolis, Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce, Hubert H. Humphrey Institute – Roy Wilkins Center, YMCA, and National Youth Leadership Council.

Tim Caskey is the Executive Director of Human Resources with Saint Paul Public Schools. Tim joined the district in August 2010. Prior to joining the district, Tim spent 11 years with Allina Hospitals & Clinics where he held a variety of positions in Human Resources and Labor Relations. Tim is a graduate of Metropolitan State University where he obtained both his undergraduate degree and his Masters of Business Administration.

Andrea Ferstan is a Senior Manager with External Engagement at Greater Twin Cities United Way, specializing in income strategies. Ms. Ferstan has an MSW in Policy, Planning and Administration and over 20 years of experience developing and implementing a wide range of programs for adults and youth. She currently helps lead United Way's Income Strategies, which includes building career pathways, leading Claim It!, a community-wide partnership to increase utilization of the Earned Income Tax Credit, and FAIM, a statewide asset building program. She also co-chairs the Ladders out of Poverty Task Force's Financial Education work.

Louis Henry owns and operates eight McDonald Restaurants in Ramsey County, employing approximately 600 people. His community involvement includes the St. Paul Business Review Council, St. Paul Police Foundation, Midway Chamber of Commerce, Boys & Girls Club, U.S. Small Business Advisory Council, Ronald McDonald House Charities, Model Cities of St. Paul, McDonald Co-op Executive Committee and St. Paul Chamber Political Action Committee. An Alum of Southern University in Baton Rouge Louisiana, Louis is on the College of Business Advisory Council and works with the US. State Department funded Foreign Exchange Program administered by the University to teach Entrepreneurship Programs to Advocacy ventures in Africa. In 2010, he taught a course in Entrepreneurship at the University of Liberia in Monrovia. He served in the U.S. Army Reserve for 18 years as a Transportation Officer with an Exit Rank Major and is a Member of the Fort Snelling Officers Club and Aircraft Owners & and Pilots Association.



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Clarence Hightower is the Executive Director of Community Action Partnership of Ramsey and Washington Counties. He is the former President/CEO of the Minneapolis Urban League where he served for ten years. Mr. Hightower serves as Vice-Chair of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU) Board of Trustees.

Butch Howard has been employed with HMSHost for more than 29 years. He has served in various management capacities within the organization including overseeing many of their complex operations and is currently General Manager overseeing the MSP Operations. Contributing to local boards and organizations in his past and current roles, Butch has served as President of the Hawaii Restaurant Association, on the Advisory Board for the Hawaii Community Colleges, on the Pension and Trust Fund for the H.E.R.E. Local 74 and is currently Secretary of the Local 17 Hospitality Benefit Fund, the President of the Airport Foundation MSP as well as the current Chair of the Ramsey County Workforce Investment Board.

Douglas Hubbard has been a business member of the Ramsey County Workforce Investment Board and Youth Council since 2002 where he has served on the Executive Committee of the WIB and held positions as the WIB Treasurer and the Youth Council Chair. Douglas currently serves as the Chair-Elect of the WIB, assuming the Chair position in August of 2011. Douglas previously worked for ARAMARK for 24 years, most recently as the Resident District Manager for foodservice at the University of Minnesota from 1997-2000. Douglas currently volunteers at Randolph Heights Elementary in St. Paul.

Ramon Leon is the founding President/CEO of Latino Economic Development Center, a membership, statewide, and ethnic based Certified Community Development Financial Institution and Opportunities Industrialization Center serving the Twin Cities area of Minneapolis St. Paul and Greater MN. He has been an entrepreneur and business owner since a young age in both Mexico and the United States. He has been an active social justice leader in his community, and was one of the early faith-based Latino organizers in Twin cities through “Interfaith Action” and “Isaiah.” He is also one of the pioneers of the economic development movement in Minneapolis and was the first president of the founding board of directors of “Cooperative Mercado Central”, an economic justice, community-based cooperative project that sparked the revitalization of Lake Street in Minneapolis.

Cyndi Leshner is the retired President and CEO of Northern States Power Company-Minnesota and Xcel Energy Company. During her career at Xcel Energy she served as Chief Administrative Officer and Chief Human Resources Officer, President of NSP Gas, Vice President of Human Resources and various other positions. In 2004, Leshner was appointed Chair of the Governor’s Workforce Development Council. She presently serves on the Board of Directors of Anchor Bank, Jete Corporation, the Twin Cities Area Red Cross, the Animal Humane Society, Saint Paul Foundation, Children’s Hospital, Opportunity Partners and the University Of Minnesota Institute Of Technology Advisory Board.

Janet Ludden is CEO of Employer Solutions, Inc. (ESI), a workforce intermediary service whose mission is to meet employers’ hiring needs and provide training and job opportunities to people with barriers to successful employment. ESI assists businesses in discerning the compensable skills of non-traditional workers and successfully hiring and promoting them. Through its workforce development and job training initiatives, ESI works with multiple social, human, and community service organizations whose missions aim to reduce poverty and racism, reduce achievement disparities, increase the independence and self-determination of vulnerable people, prepare and train disadvantaged people for jobs, and assist people to more fully participate in their communities and achieve their highest level of self-sufficiency.



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Kevin Martineau is a lifelong resident of Minnesota, born in St. Paul, growing up in Maplewood, and currently living in Chisago City, MN with his wife Merri. With both Mdewakanton Dakota & Ojibwa ancestors and a French heritage, Kevin's ancestry represents some of Minnesota's original people and their earliest European trade partners. A 1974 graduate of Augsburg College in Minneapolis, Kevin has been an Executive Director of nonprofits for over twenty-five years. Currently the Executive Director of the American Indian Family Center in St Paul, he is also the Chair of the Eastside Prosperity Campaign and Vice-Chair of St. Paul Indians in Action.

Repa Mekha serves as President and CEO of Nexus Community Partners, a community building intermediary that works at the intersection of community building and community development, engaging communities of color and immigrant communities to achieve equitable, sustainable revitalization in Minneapolis and St. Paul. Repa has 20+ years of experience in community-based leadership, community strengthening efforts, asset and wealth building strategies, organizational leadership and development, systems change efforts, and work in urban settings. He has been recognized locally and nationally as an innovative and visionary leader.

Paul Nelson is the Senior Business Developer at Shaw-Lundquist Associates, Inc, a respected minority-owned general contractor based in St. Paul with projects nation-wide. Paul's professional and community activities are many, and he places a high value on giving back to the community. Among these activities, Paul served as Chair of the Ramsey County Workforce Investment Board in 2007-2008 and led the search for a new WorkForce Center, resulting in the Ramsey County WorkForce Center- Saint Paul at 540 Fairview Ave.

Tran T. Nhon - Since 2005, in addition to his management consulting services to his clients on minority economic development, Tran is on a number of local boards and recently served as Chair of the Ramsey County Small Business Enterprise Advisory Committee. In 2008, he was appointed by the Governor of Minnesota to the Council on Asian-Pacific Minnesotans, an advisory body to the Governor and the Legislative Assembly.

Carolyn Roby, Vice President, Wells Fargo Foundation

Mary Russell is the Manager of Leadership Support and Organization Effectiveness for HealthPartners. One of her major responsibilities is managing the Lean process across all the HealthPartners entities which include the Hospital, Medical Group and Health Plan divisions. She also has shared responsibility for HealthPartners Leadership Development and Support Initiatives. Mary has been a member of the Ramsey County Investment Board since 2008. She has served as the Board Chair-Elect and Chair and she is currently chairing the WIB's Healthcare Initiative.

Carrie Jo Short is Director of Grants and Program Services for the Minnesota Community Foundation and the Saint Paul Foundation, providing leadership to grant making in the areas of economic development and environment/ land use for the Saint Paul Foundation, the F.R. Bigelow Foundation and Mardag Foundation. Carrie Jo holds a master's degree in business administration in nonprofit management from the University of St. Thomas and a bachelor's degree in political science and in American studies from St. Olaf College.



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Sheila Wright, Ph.D., is currently Director of the Minnesota Office of Higher Education, a cabinet-level appointment with Governor Mark Dayton. Previously, she served as a tenured professor and Dean in the School of Education at Hamline University. Dr. Wright began her career in higher education at Minnesota State University, Mankato, Carleton College in Northfield, and as a tenured faculty member at Saint Xavier University in Chicago. In North Carolina, she also taught as an adjunct at North Carolina State University, Saint Augustine's College, and Coastal Carolina Community College. Prior to higher education, she worked in P-12 education and with state agencies in North Carolina and Alabama.

