

LI BUSINESS

Aiming to aid minority businesses

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The Long Island African American Chamber of Commerce is launching a series of workshops to encourage minority businesses to become New York State-certified as minority-owned firms.

The chamber's campaign to increase participation is in alignment with Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo's commitment in 2011 to provide 20 percent of state contract dollars to minority and women-owned business enterprises (MWBES).

"We are going to be the voice of businesses in the African-American community that leads the charge to train businesses to become certified," chamber president Phil Andrews said.

The chamber, in collaboration with the Nassau County Department of Minority Affairs and the Roosevelt Community Revitalization Group, will be conducting a series of free two-hour workshops starting Saturday and continuing Aug. 2 and 9 from 10 to noon at the Baldwin Public Library. Preregistration is required by calling 516-208-9988.

"We want our professional services as well as our trades to be aware of the contracting opportunities," said workshop instructor Charlene Thompson of Baldwin-based Thompson Economic Development Services. "We want to give business owners the skills and capacity to successfully engage in government contracting on the local stage and national levels, so they can not only sustain themselves and their employ-



At law offices in Freeport yesterday Phil Andrews leads a chamber of commerce discussion of training workshops for minority-owned businesses that want to pursue state certification.

ees, but hire folks and create jobs."

One business owner who will be attending the workshop is real estate attorney Sacha A. Comrie, of Martin Molinari Coward & Comrie in Freeport. "I know there are opportunities out there," Comrie said. "I know that everyone needs legal services, whether it is the government or the man on the street."

Last year, utilization of MWBEs in state contracts through 97 public agencies and authorities reached 21.06 percent, the equivalent of

\$1.48 billion. About 49 percent of the contracts issued from fiscal year 2012 to 2013 were in the construction industry, and 9 percent were in construction-related professional services. Another 20 percent went toward nonconstruction-related professional services, and 12 percent went to commodities.

"The state is a huge purchaser," said Alphonso David, the governor's deputy secretary for civil rights. "... We want to be engaged in a process that is fair."

There are 7,296 certified MWBE firms in the state, of

which 893 are on Long Island, according to Empire State Development's Division of Minority and Women's Business Development. Cuomo is seeking to add 2,000 statewide, David said.

"The [certification] process is really cumbersome, but you have to be in it to win it," said chamber vice president Sharon Davis, president and CEO of S.J. Edwards Inc. The Freeport firm, which provides employee benefits services, received certification in 2013.

It normally takes about 90 days for businesses to get certified, David said.

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