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WORK IN PROGRESS JOB DISCRIMINATION IN ROCHESTER

A DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE SPECIAL REPORT PART 2 OF 2

Driven by diversity

AREA COMPANIES RECOGNIZE THE NEED TO MIRROR THE COMMUNITY



AIMEE K. WILES staff photographer

Jamar Myers, 19, consults with Wegmans front-end manager Terri Quatro as part of his training as a service team leader. He acknowledges that enrollment in a company scholarship program has turned his life around. "If it hadn't been for this program," he said, "I wouldn't be here."

STORY BY BEN RAND STAFF WRITER

Five years ago, by his own admission, he was a bully. A troublemaker. A difficult kid headed in the wrong direction. And to him, Wegmans was just a place that sold food.

Today, 19-year-old Jamar Myers of Rochester is on a different path. He has just been promoted to service team leader at the Wegmans store on Chili Avenue, a job that will have him supervising 30 to 40 cashiers. He dreams of working his way up to become a store manager, a corporate vice president or even president.

Myers recently flew to Washington, D.C., with the current holder of that job — Danny Wegman — and answered questions from a congressional committee studying innovative training programs. Next fall Myers expects to begin studying business administration at Roberts Wesleyan College.

None of it, he says, could have happened without a groundbreaking push by Wegmans to make itself a more attractive place for minorities and women to work. Myers benefited from a scholarship program that seeks to forge long-term corporate relationships with youths from poor sections of the city.

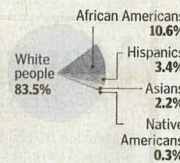
His story helps illustrate how far some companies will go to build work forces that mirror their communities — a quest that is meeting with increasing success here and across the nation.

Rochester-area employers are dramatically more diverse than they were 10 years ago, a function both of changing demographics and shifting corporate culture on matters of race and gender.

Minorities now hold 16.5 percent of

Diversity on the job

Racial minorities now hold 16.5 percent of jobs in the Rochester region, up from 12.8 percent a decade ago. Leading the way: growth in Hispanic and Asian-American workers.



SOURCE: Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
PAULINA GARCES REID staff artist

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INSIDE Companies now realize that diversity pays dividends, 5A

ON THE WEB See original documents, including a Rochester woman's discrimination complaint, an interactive timeline of anti-discrimination law; and additional statistical information showing the racial and gender breakdown of Rochester region employers. Look in "Today's Highlights" at DemocratandChronicle.com

A new-look workplace

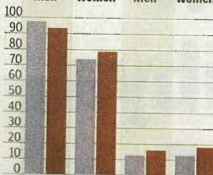
Over the past decade, minorities and women in the Rochester region have increased their numbers in most job categories. The data are based on reports filed with the federal government by employers with more than 100 workers and government contractors with more than 50 workers.

1991 2000

In thousands of workers

ALL EMPLOYEES

White Minority
Men Women Men Women



OFFICIALS & MANAGERS

Examples: plant managers, department managers, superintendents, railroad conductors, ship captains, farm operators.



PROFESSIONALS

Examples: accountants and auditors, airplane pilots, architects, artists, chemists, designers, editors, engineers, lawyers.



TECHNICIANS

Examples: computer programmers, drafters, engineering aides, junior engineers, mathematical aides, nurses, photographers.



SALES

Examples: advertising agents, insurance agents and brokers, real estate agents and brokers, sales and grocery clerks, cashiers.



OFFICE & CLERICAL

Examples: bookkeepers, collectors, messengers, typists and secretaries, legal assistants, stenographers.



CRAFT

(Skilled) Examples: electricians, construction and maintenance, engravers, mechanics and repairers, tailors, arts occupations, bakers, decorating occupations.



OPERATIVES

(Semi-skilled) Examples: delivery workers, dry cleaning operatives, miners, photographic process workers, truck and tractor drivers, butchers.



LABORERS

(Unskilled) Examples: garage laborers, car washers, groundskeepers and gardeners, wood choppers, farm workers.



SERVICE

Examples: barbers, cleaners, cooks, counter workers, elevator operators, firefighters, others.



SOURCE: Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

PAULINA GARCES REID, KELLY EGAN staff artists

the jobs in the six-county region, up from 12.8 percent in 1991. That's an increase of almost a third — better than the Buffalo region, New York state and the nation as a whole.

Yet discrimination complaints of all sorts continue to plague companies throughout the region, a *Democrat and Chronicle* investigation has found. The complaints come from a cross-section of the workplace, including minorities, females, older workers, people who are deaf or otherwise disabled, gays and lesbians.

And the upper levels of area companies remain generally off-limits to African Americans, Hispanics, Asian Americans and Native Americans. In 2000, white people held 93 percent of jobs as officials and managers, 90 percent of jobs as professionals and 89 percent of jobs as technicians. Those categories are the highest-ranking positions tracked by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the federal agency that enforces laws against workplace discrimination.

The numbers come from a decade of reports submitted to the EEOC. Companies with more than 100 employees must annually disclose how many white people, racial minorities, men and women work in nine separate job categories at various facilities. The reports for the Rochester region encompass about 40 percent of the local work force.

The newspaper analyzed those reports, conducted more than two dozen interviews, reviewed other studies and found that:

- Minorities now make up a larger percentage of the local work force than they do of the population as a whole — 16.5 to 15.2 percent. That's not solely because of demographic change. Minority representation in business grew 29 percent in the 1990s vs. 21 percent in the overall population.

- Larger local companies have been leading the charge. One in four U.S. workers at Xerox Corp., Bausch & Lomb Inc. and Eastman Kodak Co. was a racial minority in 2001, up from one in five a decade ago. That was no easy feat — U.S. employment for those three companies fell by one-third during the period, but their minority representation increased.

- The performance of Rochester's most recognizable employers has earned them a series of plaudits. Xerox, for instance, was recently named one of the "best of the best" places to work for minorities and women; Kodak was recognized as one of the best companies for its record of purchasing from minority and female-owned suppliers.

- Much of the progress for minorities has been confined to lower-level jobs. The local work force added 8,831 minorities in the past decade; 45 percent of those were classified either as service workers or laborers. Kodak, Xerox and B&L each struggle with similar problems; for instance, about 42 percent of minority jobs at Xerox in 2001 were office or clerical positions.

- Progress has not been quite as robust for women but is moving in the right direction. Female employment grew 12 percent in Rochester in the 1990s vs. 9 percent in the overall population.

The statistics provide a snapshot of Rochester's corporate melting pot as the nation enters what most demographers believe will be an unprecedented period of diversity. White people, for instance, no longer make up the majority in almost half of the 100 largest U.S. cities, according to a study by the Brookings Institution. Almost every prediction calls for that trend to accelerate.



Billy Ray Farmer relaxes at his Macedon home with sons Jacob, in his lap, Kyle, on his back, and wife Ruby and daughter Megan. He lost his job, he says, because he corroborated a supervisor's racist slurs. He is suing the employer.

AIMEE K. WILES staff photographer

As diversity accelerates, it becomes an increasingly critical business strategy. People of color spend \$1.3 trillion a year on products and services in the United States, about 18 percent of the nation's total consumer purchasing power, according to the University of Georgia's Selig Center for Economic Growth.

The data also offer a checkpoint on local progress on the threshold of the 40th anniversary of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. That landmark legislation made it illegal to discriminate on the basis of race, sex, religion and national origin.

Taken together, the numbers make an unambiguous statement, both for Rochester and the nation: While notable

progress has been made, there's much left to do to make work a more welcoming place for all, experts say.

That's likely to be an ongoing battle. Consider that as recently as the 1950s, employers could legally reject applicants simply because they were not white, said Laura P. Hartman, professor of business ethics at DePaul University and president of the American Society of Business Ethics. Yet today, most people would loudly object to such a plainly bigoted practice.

Hartman wonders: "What are we doing today that we'll be embarrassed about 20 or 30 years from now?"

Success stories

Jamarr Myers admits that he had no thoughts of taking a job or launching a career at Wegmans as he entered his early teens. At least, not until he got into trouble, transferred to Franklin High School and was introduced to the company's highly praised Work-Scholarship Connection.

The program, founded by Wegmans in 1987, is designed to provide practical and emotional support to students who are at risk of dropping out of school. It is now run by the Hillside Children's Center and involves dozens of employers.

The goal of Work-Scholarship is to identify troubled students at a young age — as young as sixth grade — and link them to an advocate who helps teach basic life skills, solve problems and other matters. The student is gradually introduced to the discipline of work.

When it was founded, the program was an attempt to help the Rochester area address a high dropout rate. Along the way it began helping Wegmans solve several business problems.

Wegmans — which has had seven discrimination complaints over the past 10 years — relies heavily on young people to staff its stores, particularly in cities with so-called "pockets of poverty" such as Rochester. The company has since expanded into other similar urban areas, such as Trenton, N.J., Philadelphia and Washington, D.C.

But the company suffered from a high degree of turnover — in some areas as much as 100 percent, meaning youths didn't stay even one year. By focusing Work-Scholarship on poorer areas, Wegmans is able to expand the number of recruitable youths and more meaningfully diversify.

The issue is one of dollars and cents, Danny Wegman told Congress in September. It costs \$4,000 to train a new employee but only \$2,500 to keep an individual in the Work-Scholarship program.

Results are inspiring. The program has a current enrollment of 1,000 students; 80 percent of participants graduate from high school vs. 44 percent in the overall Rochester school system; 80 percent remain employed at Wegmans.

Myers said he took some severe joshing from his friends when he first started in the program. They told him that he'd be "a janitor or pushing carts," Myers recalls. "But they believe now. If it hadn't been for this program, I wouldn't be here."

Gail Evans also probably wouldn't be where she is without Kodak's commitment to creating a more diverse workplace. Evans joined Kodak in 1980 as a custodian. Soon afterward, with Kodak's financial help, she began studying computer science part time at Nazareth College.

That degree helped propel her to her current job as chief technology officer for Kodak.com, Kodak's front door to the Internet.

Evans, an African American, praises Kodak for giving her the chance to better herself and for standing behind her — but also acknowledges her own role. "I wanted to make sure I was always qualified, the best in all I did. I didn't want to allow anyone an excuse."

Hiring and promoting qualified employees of varied backgrounds is critical for success in an increasingly diverse world, says May Snowden, Kodak's first chief diversity officer. She has built an office of 20 people in the three years since joining Kodak. "Diversity is green," says Snowden, referring to the growth in minority purchasing power.

Diversity is not an exercise in political correctness, she adds. It's an effort to get people to work together more effectively and appreciate their differences.

Diversity, dissension

Yet for all the success stories, diversity programs can create dissension in the workplace.

David Wieme, a white middle-level Kodak manager, recently filed a reverse discrimination lawsuit against the company in U.S. District Court in Rochester. He claims he was unfairly demoted last year — allegedly for failing to follow standard procedure in investigating a racial incident. He contends that he did everything by the book and that Kodak punished him because it wanted to look tough on racism. Wieme also alleges that he and other white employees are "scapegoats" caught in the push to diversify. Kodak denies his allegations; the case is pending.

Complaints of reverse discrimination are becoming more common across corporate America, said Wieme's attorney, Nelson Thomas.

Even diversity proponents disagree at times. A group of present and former African-American employees at Kodak, for example, picketed a meeting of the regional chapter of the NAACP last fall. Their complaint: the NAACP's role in Kodak's decision to provide \$3 million in raises and \$10 million in back pay to about 2,000 minorities and women more than three years ago.

The group, which calls itself "Employees Committed for Justice," feels that Kodak went back on promises to give an independent panel the final say on the size of the raises and back pay.

In the continuing battles over diversity, even bystanders can get caught in the middle. Billy Ray Farmer of Macedon was a technical cleaner for CellTech Pharmaceuticals in Henrietta when he was interviewed in connection with a co-worker's complaint that a supervisor was using racially insensitive language.

Farmer said he told a human resources staffer that he had, in fact, heard the supervisor use slurs. Not long afterward, Farmer was fired. Farmer said the company told him it was because he extended his vacation without informing his boss; Farmer contends it was clearly in retaliation for his honesty about the supervisor's language.

"All of a sudden, that supervisor was a good guy and we were the bad guys. We were the troublemakers," Farmer recalls.

He has filed a discrimination lawsuit against CellTech; federal law bars companies from retaliating against individuals who complain or expose discrimination.

In a statement, CellTech denied that it has retaliated or discriminated against anyone, but it declined to address Farmer's specific allegations.

Complex frontiers

The pro-diversity/anti-discrimination push appears to be heading into areas that are equally — if not more — controversial.

In a historic move last month, Gov. George Pataki signed the Sexual Orientation Non-Discrimination Act. The bill makes it illegal for employ-

ers and others to discriminate on the basis of sexual preferences. It was aimed primarily at protecting gays and lesbians from prejudice.

New York became only the 13th state to enact such a law, but even proponents had a criticism: It does not bar discrimination on the basis of gender identity.

Activists have lobbied Congress for many years for a national anti-discrimination bill, but to no avail, said Pamela Barres, executive director of the Gay Alliance of the Genesee Valley.

Critics argue that specifically protecting gays and lesbians from discrimination grants those groups special rights unavailable to others.

Nonsense, Barres says. The bill simply makes the workplace fairer. Until Pataki signed the bill, "if you came out in Monroe County, you could be legally fired. You had no legal recourse. And that's true in most of the country," Barres says.