

Clay Walden

Walden is district manager for Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama. He earned a bachelor of science and MBA from Troy State University. In addition to his involvement with the Chamber, Walden is on the board of the American Red Cross and is active with his church.



Richard H. Weavil

Weavil is owner of The Weavil Company LLC, and has been in the real estate industry for 30 years. He has the Certified Commercial Investment Member (CCIM) designation, and was named Realtor of the Year in 1998. He is past president of the Mobile Area Association of Realtors, the Gulf Coast Multiple Listing Service and the Commercial Investment Club, among many other industry and civic activities.



John F. Weston Jr.

Weston is vice president-international operations and in-house counsel for Cooper/ T. Smith Corp. He received a bachelor's degree in business administration from The Citadel, The Military College of South Carolina and earned a juris doctorate degree from Cumberland School of Law. Weston serves on the board of directors for Cooper/T. Smith de Mexico.



Inaugural Minority Advocate Award Given to Mobile Area Water & Sewer System



Mobile Area Water and Sewer System representatives received the first Minority Business Advocate of the Year award. Pictured from left to right are Preston Bolt, 2004 Chamber chairman; Rev. Wesley James and Archinique Kidd, MAWSS; and Joe Gerard, Coastal Ford.

Mobile Area Water & Sewer System (MAWSS), named the 2004 Minority Business Advocate of the Year by the Mobile Area Chamber, knows what it means to go "above and beyond." The award, given for the first time, recognizes a company's commitment to supplier diversity.

According to **Archnique L. Kidd**, MAWSS's coordinator for the underutilized business program, it's all about community service.

"Mobile is a diverse community," said Kidd. "We want to make sure that we serve the community, which includes everyone, and we're trying to make sure that large, small and minority businesses are being utilized by our company."

Not only does MAWSS seek out minority contractors with whom they can do business, Kidd said the company also encourages its prime contractors to utilize them as well.

"A lot of our contractors who are now working on projects with us are also looking for small and minority businesses to do business with here in the city, so we provide that information to [them]," said Kidd. "We partner [minority businesses] with some of the prime contractors, and they work under the prime contractor as a sub until they can become a prime contractor themselves."

MAWSS also monitors its contractors' use of minority businesses overall, not just on MAWSS contracts.

MAWSS's progressive program came out of a disparity study done in partnership with the University of South Alabama. The study, covering March 1993 through February 1997, determined how much work was being contracted with minority businesses by MAWSS.

The study also highlighted how many minority contractors were available to MAWSS, which began its underutilized business program two years ago.

The program is not limited to contractors in the construction trades, however. "We're looking for anything from catering to office supplies," said Kidd.

"MAWSS not only had the highest contract percentage going to disadvantaged businesses, but they have also incorporated several innovative programs to increase those percentages each year," explained **Darrell Randle**, vice president for small business development for the Chamber.

One secret to MAWSS's success in employing minority businesses is its structured approach. The program educates small and minority businesses in how to do business with MAWSS. They also serve as an information clearinghouse for contractors interested in employing minority businesses.

MAWSS officials study similar programs in other cities for ideas on how to improve their own efforts. The success stories that come out of their efforts make it all worthwhile, believes Kidd.

"One of those was Hughes Plumbing & Utility Contractors," Kidd said. "They started off as a subcontractor under a large construction company, and two years ago, became a prime contractor themselves."

"Mobile is blessed to have visionary leaders like the ones at MAWSS," said Randle. "They don't do this because they have to. They do it because it's the right thing to do, and that's one more reason to recognize MAWSS as an outstanding community leader and the Minority Business Advocate of the Year."