

Building More Than Cars: Toyota Opportunity Exchange Brings Minority & Women-Owned Business Enterprises (M/WBEs) into Automotive Game

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CINCINNATI (Oct. 28, 2014) – Kevin Shurn operated his business from a two-bedroom apartment when he attended Toyota’s first-ever Opportunity Exchange in 1990. Three years later, he secured his first contract, providing janitorial services to Toyota’s Georgetown, Ky., plant. Today, his Elizabethtown, Ky.-based Superior Maintenance Co. has more than 500 employees, serving Toyota manufacturing facilities in Kentucky, Indiana and Texas.

“No one goes to the extent that Toyota does to help minority and women-owned businesses,” said Shurn, now a Tier I-level supplier. “Just as Toyota expects you as a supplier to meet quality, cost, safety and delivery expectations, it has an expectation – not only a target but an expectation – for their Tier I suppliers to work with

minority and women-owned businesses.”

It is a formula that has proven successful: now in its 25th year, Toyota’s annual Opportunity Exchange (OE) has resulted in more than \$250 million in contracts for M/WBEs like Shurn’s.

The two-day event – which included best-practice seminars, panel discussions and a trade show – concluded Tuesday, Oct. 28, at the Duke Energy Convention Center in downtown Cincinnati. Toyota Motor Engineering & Manufacturing North America (TEMA) started OE with about 100 attendees, and it has grown to become one of the largest minority business events in the country – attracting nearly 2,000 people who attend the event free of charge.

One of those is Rosa Santana. Recently, [Toyota announced](#) her newest company – Forma Automotive LLC – as its first Hispanic woman-owned direct supplier. Beginning in 2015, Forma Automotive will assemble Tacoma truck beds at Toyota Motor Manufacturing, Texas (TMMTX). Her business success story also began at Opportunity Exchange.

“Had I not participated in OE, my company would not have been known the way it is by Toyota, and we would not have been offered this great opportunity,” said Santana, who began attending Opportunity Exchange in 2005.

To show how OE works, Santana met Shurn at the 2005 event, which resulted in a chance to provide maintenance and janitorial services to TMMTX. Superior Maintenance contracted with Santana’s original staffing company, Integrated Human Capital, to provide workers for that operation; since then, IHC has provided staffing, recruitment and direct-placement services to an additional 17 suppliers at that site.

“Twenty-five years ago we saw the need to put our commitment to diversity into action – to make it real, to reflect an example for our team, for our community and for our suppliers,” said Gene Tabor, general manager of purchasing for TEMA. “I believe Toyota’s commitment leaves our own company, our Tier I suppliers and especially our M/WBEs in a better situation.

“We have examples too numerous to mention. It starts with an introduction, and can lead to a thriving business opportunity.”

Toyota has a 5 percent goal for Tier I supplier spending with minority business enterprises in North America, and, at last year’s event, a new 2 percent goal for purchases of goods and services from women-owned businesses was announced. Toyota buys from 500 suppliers across North America, which results in \$27 billion worth of purchases annually.

“I think the WBE spending goal is a positive for women,” said Linda Torakis, president of McKechnie Vehicle Components, headquartered in Roseville, Mich. “This is still a male-dominated industry and I think it’s great to encourage suppliers to look at women-owned businesses. Just providing the opportunity for us to be out there and to open the door is a great thing. We can compete on our own merits.”

Torakis began attending Opportunity Exchange in 2008, just after she and her husband had purchased McKechnie – which was on the verge of collapse. In 2010, McKechnie began talks with OE attendee Murakami Manufacturing USA Inc., which produces exterior mirrors for Toyota. This year, McKechnie secured a \$1.2 million contract to supply chrome trim to Murakami for the Lexus RX350. McKechnie also connected with Tokai Rika at OE, resulting in more than \$1 million for production of chrome-plated parts for the Ford Mustang and Fusion this year, and, in 2015, for the Nissan Maxima.

Tier I suppliers see a distinct value in partnering with smaller minority-owned firms.

Larry Crawford, chairman and CEO of Diversity-Vuteq LLC, is a Tier I supplier who has attended OE for nearly 15 years. “At an event like this we are always looking because people come up with innovative ideas,” Crawford said. “What’s discounted a lot is that minority companies have to be really innovative just to survive because usually they’re small in scope and face enormous challenges, so sometimes they come up with things the big companies haven’t thought of and better ways of doing them.”

Over the course of more than two decades, Opportunity Exchange has helped generate new business for M/WBEs and continues to help direct suppliers diversify their own supply base. These partnerships help add value and innovation to Toyota’s products and services. For more information about Toyota’s supplier diversity program, please visit www.toyotasupplier.com. Additional information can be found at www.toyotaopportunityexchange.com, on Facebook at www.facebook.com/ToyotaOE and Twitter, www.twitter.com/ToyotaOE.