

1,600 network at Toyota's minority event

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DOWNTOWN — Carl Satterwhite has done more than \$10 million in new business with Toyota Motor Engineering & Manufacturing North America since becoming a supplier for the automaker.

The president of RCF Group of West Chester attributes that boon directly to Toyota's "Opportunity Exchange," billed as one of the largest minority business events in the country.

Satterwhite was among 1,600 attendees at this year's exchange Tuesday at Duke Energy Convention Center, a place where minority-owned companies mingled to develop business relationships with 300 of Toyota's direct suppliers.

Over the past two years, the event has generated more than \$75 million in contracts for minority-owned businesses, organizers said.

Attendees this year came from across the Midwest and beyond, representing a more than 10-fold increase from the event's first year in 1990 when 110 attended.

"The business deals that result from this are important," Satterwhite said. "But the greater value is parlaying (the information from the event) into other contracts with other large businesses. In that way, it is more far reaching than just an immediate contract."

Keith White, president of Liggon Trucking in Evansville, Ind., said a relationship built last year at the exchange with supplier Millenium Steel has led to a new flatbed division for his company and \$1.2 million in revenue shipping steel to Toyota's manufacturing plants.

"At many of these things you feel as if it's all talk, and you walk away feeling like you'll never hear from them again," White said. "Here, I don't feel like I'm wasting my time. I'm walking away with hope and an opportunity to grow my business."

Adrienne Trimble, manager of supplier diversity for Erlanger-based Toyota Motor Engineering & Manufacturing, said the exchange has grown steadily because of its reputation as a catalyst for new business for minority firms.

"It's really been because there have been such tangible results," she said. "Our suppliers share in our commitment to diversity and it shows."

She added that the company's philosophy on diversity also reflects the values of its consumers. Toyota is the No. 1 auto brand in the U.S. with African-Americans, Hispanics and Asians, she said.

Satterwhite, a member of the board of directors of the Minority Business Accelerator in Cincinnati, said the event shows the way for other large companies looking to increase their diversity.

"Toyota is one of the best at doing this type of outreach," he said. "This is a very powerful model for how to do this. Mandates don't work. Bringing people together does work."

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