

Black-Owned Firm Gets FedEx Fuel Contract

By Roderick C. Willis
Special to the NNPA from the AFRO-American Newspapers

WASHINGTON (NNPA)—Forty-five years ago, a small Black boy worked alongside his mother, picking cotton in the fields of Moscow, Tenn. The backbreaking work, scars from cotton thorns on his hands and the southern summer heat burned permanent memories into his brain. “That experience motivated me for life and even at that young age, I knew I wanted to get my mother out of those blazing cotton fields, and I wanted to go with her.”

Recently, Carnelious Jones, president and CEO of OMO Petroleum, flew to Memphis, just 40 miles east of Moscow, and signed a historic contract with Federal Express. The Baltimore-based firm is the first African-American-owned wholesale distributor of petroleum products to Federal Express and has begun fueling the company’s fleet of trucks at Baltimore-Washington International Airport.

It is significant that although OMO is a minority firm, the contract was not awarded as a minority set-aside or part of a sheltered-market program. The FedEx contract was competitively bid and awarded because Jones and OMO Petroleum Co., the lowest bidder, had the capacity and the technical expertise to perform the job.

OMO also owns a petroleum

tank farm on the Wicomico River in Salisbury, Md., with the capacity to store 2.5 million gallons of fuel for redistribution, and to store and redistribute lubricants.

The FedEx contract will run for two years and OMO will make two deliveries of fuel daily, filling each truck in the fleet to guarantee next-day and on-time delivery.

Jones has invested heavily in technology for this contract. Each FedEx truck is equipped with computer systems that identify it and calculate the amount of fuel delivered. The data is transferred electronically to the OMO fuel delivery truck, and then downloaded to OMO computers at corporate headquarters.

The process continues through a partnership with Texas Southern University, the only historically Black university that offers a bachelors degree in petroleum engineering. Data concerning the number of gallons delivered and the identification of each truck in the fleet is electronically transferred to Texas Southern, then processed and up-linked to a technology firm in Tennessee, under contract with FedEx, that tracks the company’s entire fuel purchases.

Next month, OMO will begin servicing a contract to provide heating oil for the state of Maryland through the General Services Administration, including the University of Maryland Eastern Shore.

Since his humble beginnings, Jones has overcome a number of daunting barriers to become the first African-American wholesale independent oil company.

“There was no precedence for a Black-owned oil company performing at this level,” said Jones. “There were no African-American mentors in this industry that I could talk with or confide in, which made the journey even more challenging. Access to capital was a major impediment to getting the business started, and I also had to learn the technical and political aspects of the petroleum industry.”

Along the way, Jones has never forsaken his roots or his commitment to giving back to the community. Jones created the OMO Science, Energy and Technology Foundation, a non-profit corporation that has adopted Carver Vocational and Technical High School in Baltimore. The foundation has also provided a group of local, at-risk youth with a weekend at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy in New London, Conn., and a visit to the Freedom Schooner Amistad in New Haven.

“It is incumbent upon every African-American professional to give back to his community and to uplift the race. We must build on our successes and pass that knowledge onto the next generation. We can’t close the door once we have passed through,” said Jones.

Blacks Turn To Non-Traditional Jobs

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For Black men and Black women the rate is at 10.2 and 9.7 percent respectively—double that of Whites and well above the overall rate.

The number of OIC clients has increased by 30 percent since last year at its 58 centers in 30 states across the country because of the poor economy, Cotton says.

Teneedsha Hendrix, 23, who lost her telecommunications job in February, took office skills training at OIC West in Menlo Park, Calif., but was unable to find a permanent job. She is now one of four women among 27 men in an OIC carpentry class.

“I mean, nobody was hiring and I was only getting temp jobs that lasted for a day or two,” says Hendrix. “And I was like thinking then, you know, this can’t be serious.... It was very stressful because I have a son I have to care for and I have bills to pay, rent to pay, car note, bills. And it was like going on for like two months and it was very frustrating and I really didn’t know what was going to happen.”

After completing the carpentry class next month, she believes she’ll be in a better position to land a job.

“It’s a different field for women, but it’s money in there. It’s a lot of money in construction,” she says. “I’ll go to the union, get on the list and hopefully they’ll refer me out. They said that as a woman, we’re minorities, so we’ll get placed well.”

It’s sometimes not as easy for men seeking non-traditional jobs.

When James Sutton, 26, of Montgomery, Ala., went looking for his first nursing job last year, he said the front desk clerk at Capitol Hill Nursing Home greeted him with the words, “We’re not taking any more applications for orderly or floor man.”

Sutton, a nursing graduate of Trenholm State Technical College in Montgomery, soon landed a job as a licensed practical nurse, one of only two Black male nurses among 25 at the Wetumpka Health and

Rehabilitation Center.

“As far as finding other jobs, you can’t find anything, pretty much. I’d been going from job to job,” he says. “We had a young family starting out, just me and my wife and at the time, she was pregnant, so I needed to get into a field,” he says. “I know it was a stable field to go into and there was a shortage, so there’s going to be a need for it.”

Economists and job training experts predict that as long as the economy remains unstable—especially with mass layoffs of men who are highly skilled in computer and information technology—people will continue to explore untraditional roles

Some African-Americans are taking risks to start their own businesses, says James B. Stewart, a labor expert at Penn State University.

“For one, corporations are downsizing top professionals rather than lower scale jobs. Secondly, a lot of African-Americans that wound up in the corporate arena sort of run into a glass-ceiling or a concrete ceiling where they can’t excel to a level that is commensurate with their skills,” the professor explains.

Martin Smith of Bowie, Md., an investment management consultant, has made a leap of his own.

With a wife, four children and another baby on the way, Smith, 34, left Merrill Lynch last month to start his own investment firm, Kingdomtrust Capital Management LLC. The reputation of Merrill Lynch, which laid off more than 15,000 employees two years ago and recently was tainted by its role in the Enron scandal, had begun to erode.

“Actually, Merrill Lynch was more of a risk,” says Smith.

With the luxury of independence, he now hopes to reach out to medium-income investors. Currently, he says, 85 percent of his clients are White.

“I can still serve the high-networth investor and the institutional investor, while serving and educating those who don’t have the same kind of money, but have the needs and the desire,” Smith says.

Investing is not on the mind of Donald Whitaker right now.

Whitaker, 45, a native of Washington, D.C., is working odd jobs such as lawn care in the summer, snow removal in the winter and repairing friends’ cars year-round. But he is trying to increase his income by enrolling in

computer-engineering classes.

“In the computer field, it’s more promising,” Whitaker says.

But how promising is the economy overall?

“The hope is that when the economy turns around that some of these jobs that were lost will be recovered,” says Ransford Palmer, economics professor at Howard University. “On the other hand, other people are saying the economy will turn around but it won’t bring the jobs back. It’s going to just sort of be a jobless recovery.”

That’s not unusual for Black people.

“We’re the last hired and first fired,” Palmer says. “That still is the case. The second thing is that the level of skills, although it has been growing and the gap has been narrowing, we’re still behind the larger population in terms of skills. And so, even though jobs may be available, all you need to do is look in one of the major newspapers, we’re not filling those jobs because of the skills gap.”

As usual, Black teens are experiencing the highest gap in racial disparity in unemployment. While the unemployment rate for White teens is 15.8 percent, the rate for Black teens is 36 percent. So even if Black teens want to help their family, they have a hard time landing jobs.

According to a national survey of unemployed workers conducted by the National Employment Law Project (NELP), unemployed African-Americans can barely pay their bills. The margin of error for the survey is 4.9 percent. Among the findings of the telephone survey:

* Sixty-one percent of unemployed African-Americans have cut back on spending for their children, compared with 41 percent of unemployed Whites;

* Twenty-nine percent of unemployed African-Americans have interrupted their own or a family member’s education, compared to 18 percent of unemployed Whites;

* Eighty percent of unemployed African-Americans report having had trouble paying bills, compared to 60 percent for unemployed Whites;

“In the midst of all the economic hardship today, this survey proves that unemployment has taken a severe toll on the African American community,” says Maurice Emsellem, NELP’s director of public policy. “Compared with Whites, unemployed African Americans are having a much harder time making ends meet.”

African American Police Launch Class Action Suit

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Bolden-Whitaker and Officer Fields will ask the Office of Compliance to consolidate and process their complaints as a class complaint on behalf of all African American Officers subjected to discriminatory and retaliatory discipline within the past two years, in anticipation of a possible filing in U.S. District Court once the administrative process has been completed.

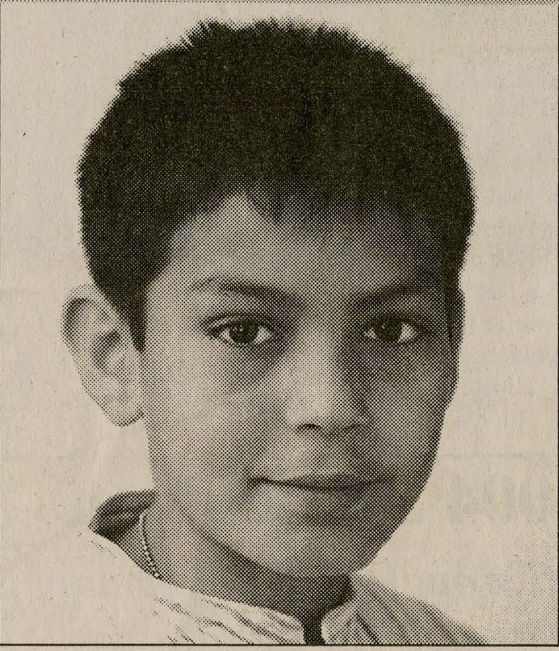
Both Officer Bolden-Whitaker and Officer Fields were issued Form

CP-535 Requests for Disciplinary Action - a sanction that becomes part of an officer’s permanent record and can serve as the basis for termination for any future offense. In Officer Bolden-Whitaker’s case, she refused to sign a form without being given an explanation of what she was signing. In Officer Field’s case, he was punished because in a break room full of officers on their lunch break, he did not have his radio on, even though there is no

clear requirement that officers keep their radios on when off duty during their uncompensated lunch breaks. “Both officers now face possible future termination for these extremely petty charges brought by white commanders of the Capitol Police,” said attorney Day.

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young achievers



Juan Carlos Espinoza
Arbor Heights Elementary

Age: 11
Favorite School Subject: Juan likes the challenge of solving math problems and working with numbers.
Hobbies/Interests: He enjoys using a computer, playing soccer and volleyball, and reading.
Proudest Achievement: Juan spoke Spanish until age eight or nine, and now he has learned English. He gets good grades and sings in a church choir.
Ambition: To be a policeman.
How He'll Get There: By studying hard, going to college or university and choosing good friends.

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is a roll call of students whose abilities, dreams and determination are leading the way toward a future full of promise.

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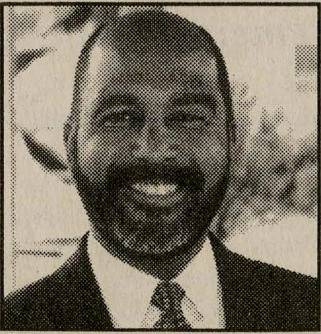
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WHEN BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO YOUR GOOD NAME

Everyday transactions require you to share personal information. An identity thief appropriates some piece of your personal information and uses it without your knowledge to commit a fraud or theft. In fact the State of Washington ranks 4th in the nation in identity theft complaints according to the Federal Trade Commission.

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