



Urban League of Eastern Massachusetts President and CEO Rahsaan Hall speaks to the recent graduation class of the StreetWise MBA Program. (Stefanie Smith)

Local entrepreneurs improve businesses through master's degree program

Joel Barnes

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Business owners in Lynn are looking forward to applying the new skills they obtained through a master's degree program to their local businesses.

The North Shore Latino Business Association (NSLBA), in partnership with Interise and the Urban League of Eastern Massachusetts, held a ceremony on Monday to honor the recent Interise StreetWise MBA Program graduates.

“We want to give this opportunity to everyone,” NSLBA President and Founder Frances Martinez said. “We are here with open doors to welcome any student that wants to really take this course.”

The program is sponsored by Interise and the Urban League of Eastern Massachusetts. Interise works with businesses owned by people of color and businesses in low-wealth communities. The Urban League of Eastern Massachusetts empowers communities to overcome racial and social barriers to employment and economic development opportunities.

Interise Chief Executive Officer Darrell Byers attended the ceremony at the NSLBA office in downtown Lynn. Seeing businesses grow and witnessing peer-to-peer networking is really fulfilling, Byers said.

“Evenings like tonight, it’s really emotional,” Byers said. “Some of these nights when you hear some of these stories, you really have tears streaming down your face. They’re that powerful... when I started at Interise, I knew it was impactful, but I didn’t realize how impactful it was.”

He also said the founders at Interise wanted to create generational wealth through programs like this one.



From left, Dr. Jose Perez, Rosa Feliz, Christian Gongora, Darrell Byers, Josue Velney, Rahsaan Hall, Tina Paine, Mayor Jared Nicholson, Felicia Moore, and Frances Martinez.

“You’re giving someone from the community a job. They may use this to pay rent, they may use this to buy their first house, they may use this to go back to school, they might have quality healthcare for the first time, you’re really building community,” Byers said.

Urban League of Eastern Massachusetts President and Chief Executive Officer Rahsaan Hall said businesses owned by people of color increase employment in their communities.

“Small businesses are some of the biggest employers in the country, and when you think about how small businesses make employment decisions sometimes, it’s a function of proximity,” Hall said. “So if you are a small business owner and a person of color who lives and works in a community of color, you’re much more likely to hire people from your own community.”

Hall said the StreetWise program seeks to help business owners improve their business proficiencies and give them insight and information about marketing, financing, and customer management relationships.

“We’re trying to give folks a leg up who have not historically had it,” Hall said. “This is an intentional act to make sure that there are pathways that are being cleared, that there are resources that are being delivered and that there are efforts being generated to lift up the profile of these small businesses.”

To qualify for the program, business owners have to be in operation for at least three years, have an annual revenue of at least \$150,000, and also have more than one employee.

Martinez said the business owners in the program reflect Lynn’s diversity.

Felicia Moore is from Lynn and owns Neighborhood Home Care on Union Street in Lynn. Moore, a nurse, has worked in healthcare for about 33 years and has been at Salem Hospital for 26 years. Moore outlined what she learned during 13 sessions of the StreetWise MBA program.

“This program is very beneficial; I think it’s one of the most successful programs regarding me reaching out to the community and reflecting on what I bring to the community...it gives me that empowerment to not only educate as a resident of Lynn but also as a professional nurse in Lynn.”

Rosa Feliz is the owner of Punta Cana Multiservices, located in downtown Lynn, and has operated since 2007. Feliz said she saw her business grow by about 35% while taking the class. Punta Cana Multiservices files income taxes and immigration paperwork, sells houses and rental properties, and has vacation packages for its clients.

“This made me feel so proud of myself, especially after being in business for such a long time,” Feliz said.

Josu’e Velney of Velney Development is another graduate. Velney is a black real estate developer who said he has his eyes set on Lynn in an industry that does not have a lot of representation by people of color. He said this program will prepare him and others like him.

“The question is not only how do we get more minorities attracted to it, how do we actually support them to actually grow because we’re starting from the back... that’s really the challenge, so it’s good to have these initiatives,” Velney said.



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