

SCANA Insights

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In 1984, Josie Claiborne, a senior attorney with SCE&G, looked around the company and realized "there's a lot of [African-American] talent here that isn't going to good use." She had heard about the American Association of Blacks in Energy (AABE), a Washington, D.C.-based national organization of professionals dedicated to bringing a black perspective to the formation of U.S. energy policy.

Why not start a South Carolina chapter at SCE&G/SCANA Corp., she thought? She proposed the idea to then-chairman Virgil Summer; he had a swift reply: "Go for it."

Today, the South Carolina chapter of AABE has 54 members, all professional or technical employees with SCE&G or SCANA, and SCANA is, in fact, the seat of the state chapter.

Ms. Claiborne, parliamentarian and first president of the South Carolina chapter, is now national secretary of AABE's board of directors. Curtis Hamilton, coordinator of transit and fleet operations for SCE&G, is current president of the state chapter, while Wayne Lynn, a substation design engineer for SCE&G, is executive vice-president. All three talked about the mission of AABE—and SCANA's support for the organization—in a recent interview.

Why the need, first of all, for an association of blacks in energy? Because government and industry decisions greatly affect the lives of African-Americans and other minorities, says Ms. Claiborne, a graduate of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Law School.

"There is some feeling that environmentalism is a white, upper-middle class, Sierra Club issue that doesn't relate to African-Americans," she says. "But that's not true. Policy decisions [on energy issues] determine who is going to bear the brunt, who is going to pay for all this. Black people have opinions on these things, and it's important that these opinions be made known."

AABE monitors energy issues and seeks to educate people on the minority perspective, she says. For example, when hazardous waste or nuclear waste sites are discussed, the first choice is often poorer, rural areas settled by lower-income, black people, she says. "We need to educate people about this, to let them know what's happening and what impact this will have on them."

The South Carolina chapter of AABE meets monthly, and has several standing programs:

- *Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA)*. Volunteers from the chapter go to malls and into black neighborhoods to help people fill out their income tax forms. "We started this about four years ago, and it's been very successful," says Hamilton, a graduate of the University of South Carolina College of Business Administration.
- *Black Energy Awareness Month*. Each October, the chapter offers classes for high school students about the safe use of electricity and other heat sources. Such education aims, among other things, to decrease the number of home fires. (More blacks die in home fires than whites.) "We also

- serve as role models for the students, and encourage them to remain in school,” says Hamilton.
- *Scholarships.* The chapter awards two \$500 scholarships annually to deserving high school students who plan to major in math, science, or engineering in college.
- *Tutorial Assistance.* Chapter volunteers have provided after-school tutoring in math and science to students at Eau Claire High School in Columbia. This program is not currently operating, but may be restarted.
- *United Negro College Fund.* Members contribute each year to this fund for deserving black students.
- *Special Projects.* Members work with SCE&G officials who weatherize a number of homes each year for low-income customers.
- *Medical Screenings.* The chapter has arranged for blood pressure screenings and Sickle Cell Anemia screenings for all SCE&G employees.

AABE, says Wayne Lynn, is a “unique organization that is helping us grow into effective professionals.” Lynn, a graduate of the University of South Carolina College of Engineering, cites the networking focus of the group and also its national affiliation, which keeps members tuned in to national energy issues that affect minorities.

Environmental topics and the newer subject of electromagnetic energy are two examples, he says. “The company has policy papers on these two subjects that basically say we must be a responsible entity on these issues,” he says, “and we support that.”

Company officials have been sensitive to minority concerns regarding energy from the beginning, say the three professionals. Top company officials, including SCANA Chairman and CEO Lawrence M. Gressette, Jr., speak at the AABE chapter meetings, and SCANA pays the national AABE dues for the state chapter members. In addition, SCANA sponsored the 1987 national AABE convention in Columbia. “The company has been extremely supportive of everything we’re trying to do,” says Hamilton.

Bob Stedman, SCE&G senior vice president of the Administrative Support Group, said the S.C. Chapter of AABE has been “a very healthy association for both of us (SCE&G and the members). We are real proud of them. They’re our ambassadors, taking our issues to the community and also collectively working to help the community.”

The company can “use us as a sounding board” on energy issues that affect minorities, says Ms. Claiborne. “I think we have had an educational impact on the company’s decision-making,” she adds.

The South Carolina Chapter of AABE will continue to look at how energy policy affects minorities, says Hamilton. It will monitor, for example, whether minorities in the state get their share of money from federal programs that help low-income homeowners pay utility bills, and also of federal “Superfund” money to clean up hazardous waste sites.

The chapter also plans to focus more directly on a variety of energy-related issues in South Carolina, including what energy legislation is being considered in the S.C. Legislature. Other plans are for the chapter to expand its membership to include energy professionals from across the state and to encourage more of a focus on math and science teaching in the local schools.

"We've done well," says Ms. Claiborne. "Our chapter has survived and grown, but there are a lot of things we still want to do." And the bottom line? "We want to develop leadership skills among African-Americans in the energy industry who can impact policy decisions."

Stay tuned.