

Spotlight on Top Employee Resource Groups

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Engineers:  
One Teaches,  
One Looks  
to the Stars**

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<http://www.blackengineer.com>

A portrait of Wanda M. Austin, a Black woman with short dark hair and glasses, wearing a red blazer over a white collared shirt and a pearl necklace. She is smiling slightly and looking towards the camera. An American flag pin is visible on her lapel.

2009 Black Engineer of the Year  
**Wanda M. Austin**  
President & CEO  
The Aerospace Corporation

# THE NEXT LEVEL: Spotlight on Entrepreneurs

by Matthew Scott

## BE AGGRESSIVE, STAY IN THE BLACK



Kenneth Banks lives life in attack mode and runs his business accordingly. Over the last 28 years, he has built Banks Contracting into a multimillion-dollar construction and real estate development firm that is always poised for future expansion.

"You can't accomplish a major goal unless you attack it on a daily basis," says Banks,

whose Baltimore-based company has a reputation for "time-condensed, quick-turnaround construction."

His success is tied to completing projects faster and more efficiently than his competitors, which saves money, and leads to repeat business and referrals. Finding ways to outpace the competition has always been his thing — whether it was outselling others as a top Mutual of New York salesman after graduating from Adelphi University, or winning a Karate competition at age 39. "Your competition helps you to find who you are," he says.

*Banks had the foresight to diversify his portfolio from construction to include real estate development, and ownership of a construction materials and supply firm.*

His unrelenting drive also led Banks to split his firm into three divisions. One unit focuses on joint-ventures with larger construction companies to take on projects greater than \$50 million. Another, the construction division, handles projects smaller than \$50 million; and his six-year-old real estate development team specializes in commercial real estate and biotech buildings.

Besides its niche in biotech, Banks Contracting has completed large hotel construction projects in Baltimore and Detroit, and owns commercial buildings in the Baltimore-Washington metro area. According to Hoover's business

information, the company posted \$7 million in revenues in 2007; earnings generated largely through construction fees, and development and management fees from building ownership.

Among Banks' many accomplishments is a joint-venture partnership to develop a \$550 million building at Johns Hopkins Hospital. He also has a construction, development and ownership deal for the \$200 million University of Maryland at Baltimore Biotech Park. In addition, Banks Contracting is part of a partnership between Forest City Enterprises and Presidential Partners, a minority-owned limited liability venture, which has a master development agreement to design, build, and own the \$1 billion Science and Technology Park at John Hopkins in East Baltimore. Scott Levitan, senior vice president and development director for the Forest City New East Baltimore Partnership, says that Banks has been very instrumental in keeping the John Hopkins science and technology park project moving forward as challenges have arisen over the last two years.

With his imprint on so many major construction projects in Maryland, it's no wonder that Banks Contracting was selected the 2008 Minority Developer of the Year by the Baltimore City Mayor's Office.

Banks' ability to multitask and solve problems with sound solutions has earned him respect in the business community. He is also a booster of local talent. His firms hire civil, mechanical, and electrical engineering graduates from Morgan State University and University of Maryland.

Banks has also had the foresight to further diversify his portfolio. Recently, he became a partner in a local parking garage, and has established a construction materials and supplies firm. "In these economic times, we have to change the structure of what we used to do," he explains. By expanding his company into the real estate development business six years ago and pursuing projects outside of its specialty, Banks keeps his firm ready to attack the competition. "There is always a way to solve a problem without a lot of money," he says.

**BANKS**  
CONSTRUCTION | DEVELOPMENT



#### PROFESSIONAL ACHIEVEMENT INDUSTRY

Throughout his 11-year **IBM** career **COLIN J. PARRIS**, PhD, has distinguished himself. Currently, he leads efforts to direct companies that bring highly visual, interactive interfaces from video gaming into the business sphere, science, and healthcare—the world of digital convergence. “From delivery of end-to-end technical support for IBM’s server product line, to launching the Blue Gene systems [the world’s fastest supercomputer], to creating market opportunities in Internet technologies, Colin has exemplified technology leadership, innovation, and creativity in IBM,” says Rod Adkins, SVP, development and manufacturing, IBM Systems and Technology. Parris, a PhD in electrical engineering and computer science, University of California, Berkeley, as well as a BSEE graduate from Howard University, holds five patents and has led the corporate technology team. Another colleague calls his leadership unique because he stars in business and professional fields, and contributes “to development of world-class innovative technology and of people both inside and outside IBM.”

#### PROFESSIONAL ACHIEVEMENT INDUSTRY

In the 1960s, **DENNIS R. COPELAND**’s US Army veterans benefits paid for a business administration degree, which helped speed his entry into that era’s wave of data processors exploring Internet technologies and e-commerce. Today, Copeland has three-plus decades of experience automating government services such as applying for loans, reviewing retirement records, or seeing where a government check is. He also provided internships to many minority students — now professional technologists, the chance to use cutting-edge computer systems and software. Critical issues **The MITRE Corporation** principal information systems engineer worked on include: providing technical support for the world’s largest automated biometrics system that collects fingerprints and digital images of more than 80 million visitors to the US; development of the Veterans Affairs health administration intranet, and accurate decision-making for claims at the Social Security Administration. Copeland has also been involved in many of Washington D.C.’s efforts that focus on providing government services, economic development, and revitalization in underserved neighborhoods.



#### ENTREPRENEUR AWARD

**KENNETH R. BANKS** has built a legacy for the next generation of black business leaders. Over the past 28 years, **Banks Contracting** has grown from a three-man operation to a multi-million dollar construction and development enterprise. Today, in partnership with other companies, his 40 design and build professionals provide construction services to the region’s largest projects. These include a \$600 million clinical building at Johns Hopkins Hospital, to be completed in January 2010, and a \$100 million physical education complex at Coppin State University. Last year, Banks completed construction management services for the Hilton Baltimore at Camden Yards. In 2001, he expanded into real estate development. Together with partners, he now has equity in two biotech parks: University of Maryland at Baltimore Biotech Park and the \$1 billion dollar Science + Technology Park at Johns Hopkins. In 2008, Banks was recognized as the City of Baltimore Minority Developer of the Year.