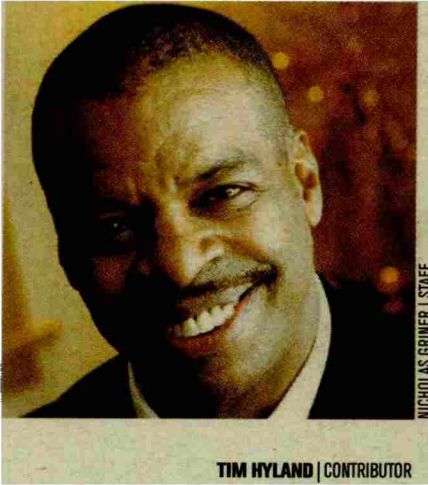


Q^A

Talking with *Kenneth Banks* President *Banks Contracting Co.*



Kenneth Banks says it's time for Americans to wake up to this simple reality: America is falling behind.

"Look at the signs all around us," says Banks, president of Banks Contracting Co. in Baltimore. "When [World War II] ended, 47 percent of the world's GDP was created by the U.S. Now we're at about 24 percent. That's a big difference. We're not going in the right direction. We have to stem the tide and begin to understand what's happening. We need to make some changes and stop fighting, city by city and state by state, and begin to cooperate."

In other words, he says, the time for regional thinking has come. And Banks is doing his part to make that happen.

He recently joined the board of the Chesapeake Crescent Initiative, a new effort of government and business leaders from around the region that aims to increase regional cooperation and make the area a more productive, more enjoyable, greener place to live. As one of Baltimore's most successful minority businessmen, Banks brings an important voice to the initiative, which he specifi-

cally hopes will create better educational opportunities for citizens in the region — and by extension get America back on the right track.

BBJ: What exactly is the Chesapeake Crescent Initiative, and what is it trying to accomplish?

Banks: It's basically a think tank. It's focused on a few specific areas — regional collaboration, environment and energy concerns, transportation, innovation and the economy and sustainable development. And the question we're asking is, 'How can we get everybody on the same page and not be so parochial in our interests?'

BBJ: Why is regional thinking the way to go, in your opinion?

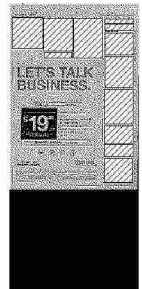
Banks: It gives us more political advantage, more financial advantage. There are economies of scale that can be put to use. A big part of what we were talking about was the biotech industry. You have federal labs and state labs here. The question is, why aren't they talking to each other? If they talked, it would be easier to see if there are any commercial applications [for research]. We could put together a central holding tank where all of these labs could put their ideas into. This area has a tremendous amount of assets, but the assets are currently unrelated.

BBJ: Was there a model for this kind of initiative that the founders of the Chesapeake Crescent followed?

Banks: I think regionally and even globally now, you're seeing entire countries getting together and doing things this way. I think the U.S. has really fallen behind in a lot of ways. You contrast the success of our education system with Korea, and it's surprising. People in the U.S. of my age — say, people between 55 and 65 — only about 10 percent of them graduated from college. In this current generation, maybe 51 to 52 percent are graduating from college. But Korea is doing much better. They've had a policy emphasizing education while we have de-invested in education here. We need to look at education.

BBJ: You seem very passionate about this idea. What excites you about it?

Banks: I'm just interested in public policy. A hundred years ago when the public policy was to not take care of our raw sewage, all of that stuff went into our sewers and streams and rivers. Those policies created a problem down the line. At some point it had to be cleaned up. Our policies that we have now are



important. They're important for the citizens of this country, for our lifestyle, for the continuance of good business in this country. Almost everything in our lives will be affected by the decisions we make now. That's why I'm interested in public policy.

BBJ: Are minority business issues prominent in the initiative?

Banks: There are a few other African-Americans on the board with me. But I think this initiative is just good for business. The more business there is, the more there is to share. I do think along with this there are some conversations about minority inclusion that are taking place. And that's part of what I bring to the board — that experience and the idea of inclusion. I can't say it's the main objective, but it's a part of the conversation.