

BRAG Gala Honors Sadove and "Magic" Johnson

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Stephen I. Sadove, June Horne and Karin Sadove

Photo By Margot Jordan and Terrence Jennings

With a touch of Magic and a “power of change” theme, the Black Retail Action Group held its annual scholarship and awards gala on Friday at Cipriani on Wall Street.

Among the honorees, NBA Hall of Famer Earvin “Magic” Johnson staged an auction of seven courtside Los Angeles Lakers tickets and a signed jersey to help the cause, and Saks Fifth Avenue chairman and chief executive officer Stephen I. Sadove emphasized the role of the individual. “Department stores are waiting for innovation,” he said. “We fundamentally need to rethink how we can operate. Each of you has the opportunity to bring about change.”

But when it comes to diversity, the industry has been a slow mover. “For over 30 years, BRAG has sought to draw attention to the fact that African-Americans and all people of color are practically absent from the executive ranks of U.S. retail companies,” Gary Lampley, BRAG’s president told the crowd of 500, which raised \$250,000 during the evening. “This is an ironic and frustrating enigma, particularly when African-Americans made up \$913 billion of the total U.S. retail spend in 2008, financially contributing directly to the organizations that exclude them.”

Lampley said BRAG commissioned an independent firm to determine the number of African-Americans in merchandising and created a job bank for retail and related companies seeking diverse talent to post executive-level positions. “African-Americans comprise only 2.7 percent of merchandisers across the companies studied. Results also show that at the senior levels, African-Americans are not holding stakeholder-level roles within any of these companies,” Lampley said.

Johnson was honored for his basketball career and as founder of Magic Johnson Enterprises, which brings retailing, movie theaters and other services, including Starbucks, to underserved urban areas. “My whole model is overdelivering to my partners and overdelivering to the community,” Johnson said.

Richard Dent, senior vice president and chief operating officer of Victoria’s Secret Pink, who was also honored, said the true measure of a man is his character and integrity and how much he reaches out to help others. “This is a model I aspire to.”

Others honored were Constance White, style director at eBay; Shawn Outler, group vice president of multicultural merchandising and vendor development at Macy’s Inc.; Johnny Taylor, president and ceo, Rushmoredrive.com, and Best Buy Corp.

Colin and Latisha Daring, co-founders of Pieces Boutique in Brooklyn, N.Y., received the J.J. Thomas Innovators Award.



Gary Lampley and John Bartlett
Photo by Margot Jordan and Terrence Jennings



Aaron Ross of the New York Giants with Magic Johnson
Photo by Margot Jordan and Terrence Jennings