

## BRAG Dinner Focuses on Message

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Photo By: Margot Jordan

Naomi Campbell and Jeffrey Tweedy, president of Sportswear G-III Apparel Group

There were inspirational words and a record crowd of 600 guests at the Black Retail Action Group's 36th annual sponsorship and awards dinner-dance at Cipriani on Wall Street last week.

The festive atmosphere, however, didn't overshadow the message that more must be done to recruit and retain people of color so they can rise as retail executives.

The irony, BRAG president Gail Monroe-Perry suggested, is that the black community has enormous buying power, representing \$845 billion, which is estimated to rise to \$1.1 trillion by 2012. But only 2 percent of U.S. merchandising executives are black.

"We are as important, if not more important, to the retail community as in 1970," when BRAG was founded, Monroe-Perry said. She also decried "a lack of representation on the runways and in advertising."

Among its many activities, BRAG organizes mentorships, seminars and workshops, and works to promote the acceptance and advancement of people of color in retail and related industries. Major retailers, including Wal-Mart Stores, Macy's, Limited Brands, TJX Cos., Sean John, Saks Fifth Avenue, Bloomingdale's and Lord & Taylor are among the companies that support BRAG.

"To reach out to young people, to share your experiences with the kids, that's what really counts," Rep. Charles Rangel (D., N.Y.), chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, told the crowd. "It's having mentors."

Rangel said he learned from the street, growing up in a poor neighborhood, and also from his experiences working in hardware shops and drugstores, and selling vacuums. "Selling ideas and being creative, this is what life is all about," he said.

Twenty-six student scholarships were awarded at the dinner. In addition, Lisa Price, founder and managing partner of Carol's Daughter, received the BRAG J.J. Thomas Business Innovators Award.

BRAG Business Achievement Awards went to John Demsey, group president of the Estée Lauder Cos.; Joe Dudley, president and chief executive officer of Dudley Products; Marti Moore, divisional vice president of cosmetics at Lord & Taylor, and Mikki Taylor of Essence Magazine.

Naomi Campbell received the BRAG Special Recognition Award, and Ethan Shapiro, ceo of Urban Brands, accepted the BRAG Corporate Award. He said 97 percent of his employees are people of color and 98 percent are women, adding that his company, which operates the Ashley Stewart and Marianne chains, is the sole U.S. firm targeting only people of color in its marketing programs.

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