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**Pawtucket reaches out to minorities, women, and disadvantaged businesses - by Donald Grebien**

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Donald Grebien

Last month the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) hosted an information session at the Cape Verdean American Community Development Center in Pawtucket to celebrate Black History Month. Some two-dozen local small businesses attended the session that was opened by senator Jack Reed who was joined by SBA New England Regional administrator Mike Vlacich and district director Mark Hayward.

Also joining the session was the city of Pawtucket, the R.I. Small Business Development Center hosted by the University of Rhode Island, Navigant Credit Union, and Lode Star Wealth; all of which discussed critical aspects of business ownership such as technical assistance resources, wealth and retirement management, small business financing, and local economic development programs.

Pawtucket's commerce director Sandra Cano, planning director Bianca Policastro and senior planner Anthony Hebert brought greetings from the city of Pawtucket and shared details about the city's efforts to support the small business community including minority, women, and disadvantaged businesses through economic development incentives and guidance on the city's regulatory process.

Pawtucket continues to be committed to promoting smart, responsible growth of small businesses within our city that respects our rich history of economic innovation, being the birthplace of the American Industrial Revolution, its cultural diversity, and the unique character of our community. Over the years, my administration has worked to support minority, women, and disadvantaged business enterprises by being proactive, offering information through small business webinars during the pandemic including an all-Spanish webinar targeted at our Latino and immigrant business community, bi-lingual small business loan application forms, and working closely with local partners like Progresso Latino, the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, and the R.I. Black Business Association to connect with minority-owned businesses.

I am pleased that the New England Institute of Technology (NEIT) is working closely with the Boys & Girls Club of Pawtucket (BGCP) and Pawtucket Central Falls Development (PCFD) to provide greater access to higher learning opportunities for our students and adult learners in Pawtucket. NEIT is establishing a Pawtucket presence with a new University Resource Center downtown, easily accessible with its location at 2 Bayley St.

The University Resource Center will be the point at which Pawtucket students can embark on a dedicated shuttle to the NEIT campuses in Warwick and East Greenwich. The new center will provide a shuttle waiting area, house a community meeting space and a student lounge. NEIT will offer information sessions for students, their families, and friends as well as prospective students.

We are thrilled to be working with NEIT on this initiative which will allow Pawtucket residents to increase their knowledge-base and job skill sets. Having this presence here in our city will provide more accessible and flexible higher learning and technical training opportunities for Pawtucket residents.

If you would like to learn more about Pawtucket's economic development projects/incentives, contact Sandra Cano, director of commerce, at [scano@pawtucketri.com](mailto:scano@pawtucketri.com).

Donald Grebien is the mayor of city of Pawtucket, R.I.

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