

404-584-8126

Media Contacts:

Terrisita Terry, Director of Operations tterry@atlantabusinessleague.org

Leona Barr-Davenport, President & CEO ldavenport@atlantabusinessleague.org



HUNDREDS FILL A ROOM DEBUTING PROGRAM NURTURING YOUNG BLACK ENTREPRENEURS

Atlanta Business League holds First Public Session of the BRIDGE in 2025

(February 22, 2025, Atlanta, GA) The main meeting room of the Gathering Spot near Georgia Tech's campus hosted a mix of business professionals and aspiring entrepreneurs the evening of February 20th. They ranged in age from 19 years old to those who have owned successful businesses for more than 50 years. All had come to participate in the first session of a program designed to help young people benefit from the knowledge the veteran professionals had to share.

The program was hosted by the Atlanta Business League and called The BRIDGE. It is a program that will select up to 25 young Black people, who want to be business owners and schedule a series of sessions allowing them to interact with mentors and experienced business leaders. Thursday's opening program allowed everyone to get an advance sample of the type of information that will be offered.

It began with a short welcome from the Atlanta Business League Chair, Andrella Kenner. She owns the global air navigation service provider and information technology company, CI² Aviation, Inc. In February, it marked the milestone of operating 32 years as an award-winning corporation.

She shared how mentoring would have sped her development as a business owner – if it had been available when she started her company.

“I’ve gotten into many exclusive rooms, and I’ve sat at many tables,” Andrella explained. “But there was no one there who looked like me. Starting and running a business as a woman in a male-dominated industry has been like showing up to a chess match where everyone else got the rulebook-but I had to figure it out while playing. Well. Spoiler alert: I still learned how to win! The purpose of the BRIDGE is to help you win, too.”

The President and CEO for Atlanta Gas Light and Chattanooga Gas, Pedro Cherry, reinforced Andrella’s message. He spoke as the program’s sponsor and a business success story who credited his first mentor for giving him advice as a graduate student. He said that information changed the trajectory of his life.

“I wouldn’t be where I am today without my mentors to answer my questions, provide clarity when I have doubts, share their experiences and offer proactive encouragement, suggestions and words of wisdom,” he said.

The kickoff for the BRIDGE then had an interactive section where the room was divided into four sections. Members of the host committee led each section on the importance of the words: Purpose, Leadership, Success, and Wisdom.

Then, workforce development small business owner Bianca Frails led a question-and-answer session panel among four people with incredible mentor and mentee stories to tell. Ryan and Mark Wilson are father and son. But, Ryan, the co-founder of The Gathering Spot readily admits that his successful multi-state business is based on the model of growth he learned watching his father build a multi-million-dollar company that started in the family basement. Antoinette Ball and Yolanda White know each other as aunt and niece. However, like Ryan and his father, Antoinette is a successful business executive who helped her niece, Yolanda, found and run a successful corporation of her own. After the panel discussion, the audience had a chance to question the panelists.

The program concluded with the announcement of the next scheduled BRIDGE meeting on March 25th.

“This program is a way to form continuity in the African American business community,” ABL President Leona Barr-Davenport said. “It will be an exciting way for young people to learn lessons about corporate business structure and soft business operation skills that will aid them their entire lives.”

Anyone who wants more information about the BRIDGE can reach out using the contact information listed on this release.

ABOUT THE ATLANTA BUSINESS LEAGUE

The Atlanta Business League is the premier organization for African American business owners and professionals. It is the last continuously operating affiliate of the National Business League, founded by Dr. Booker T. Washington in 1900. The ABL is dedicated to fostering effective and profitable business leadership. It has been recognized for doing so since 1933. The organization aims to equip minority, female, and aspiring businesses in Atlanta with the necessary tools for success.