—Fired cable exec

(Continued From Page 1)

recommended ... I have no idea who.

AFRO — Who recommended you for the position?

P.D. — Sam Daniels recommended me. I was working at CEBO at the time and had just started teaching a class at Towson State University ... and I was asked to take this position as Director of Franchising.

AFRO — You were hired without an interview? Did you have experience in franchising?

P.D. — When I asked Sam Street in an interview at the airport, that was the first time that I had met him, I asked him what is franchising because I absolutely was not familiar with franchising at all.

AFRO — What is your background in the cable business?

P.D. — I have a 20-year plus background in it. I've been in electronic data processing for telecommunications for 23 years.

AFRO — How extensive is your management background?

P.D. — I've had an extensive background in management and consider myself to be a professional manager because I have had project management such as the installation of the automation systems for certain financial institutions especially in New York and California. I'm also a certified manager for telecommunications systems for C & P.

AFRO — Do you feel you were qualified to serve as Director of Franchising?

P.D. — I have a pretty broad knowledge of what the cable industry is about both from management and high tech.

AFRO — Why then with all your "knowledge" of the cable business would a United Cable of Denver spokesperson, Gail Penman-Wallace, say there is no position with the parent company that you are qualified to handle?

P.D. — I feel...qualified...I was named the Minority Business Enterprise administrator. I was told before the signing (of the cable TV contract) to begin to put that mechanism in place so that we could have an equitable Minority Business Enterprise Program.

AFRO — How did United phase you out of the administrator responsibilities upon your dismissal?

P.D. — They sent a auditor to do contract services (though) I was the MBE officer, I have a background in Small Minority Business Development, and then (they) added that he was gonna be responsible for the minority personnel hiring.

AFRO — Who was the auditor sent by United to assume those duties?

P.D. — Morgan Cole.

AFRO — Did the two of you actually work together on the cable franchise?

P.D. — Morgan and I actually initially thought that he would be brought in in an operational capacity coming out of the Operations Department. He could conceivably help budget the system and help start the operation. We had really intended to work together, from early reports in February.

AFRO — According to a newspaper article Cole is now responsible for minority hiring. In your opinion being an out-of-towner can he be successful in that position?

P.D. — In a situation like cable where it impacts on the entire community I think that one should have a familiar knowledge of the mechanisms of the entire community. Baltimore is a big-little city and there are a lot of dynamics, a lot of nuances that no one just coming in can know and Morgan certainly does not. There has been no one to orientate him.

AFRO — The article also somewhat arkwardly refers to the fact that Cole "is black." What does that comment mean to you?

P.D. — I don't know what that statement was for. The fact that he is black I don't think will satisfy the community and I don't think it should... I gathered... that they were covering themselves by saying he is black so why are you complaining. I think the complaint is more deeply rooted then just the fact that he is black. Baltimore is a special place.

AFRO — Explain that comment.

P.D. — It's a market that's gonna be different from any market they have been in. I see it as a very special relationship that Baltimoreans have with themselves, with each other and with people who come in with songs and dances. Unfortunately, the timing for United's bid happened to be right on the heels of a slinking out in the night of Bob Irsay and then here comes United talking about sticken up because we're your only bidders.

AFRO — What were your feelings on United's alleged "stickem-up" approach?

P.D. — I didn't think it was a healthy attitude for a company to come in with and I thought that perhaps through interaction, through me, through me, through the fact that I'm the only person they appointed in the Baltimore area who could be even familiar with the scene here that they would take some of the information that I would give them as far as how to handle the franchising process, you know, some of the negotiating points. I thought that they would take them a little more seriously than they obviously have.

AFRO — Why do you think you were fired?

P.D. — Because Denver didn't really know what to do. I think that Sam Street wanted to get things moving so that he could go on and do what he was gonna do with his life since he wasn't gonna be the General Manager here, which he was once interested in.

AFRO — What do you mean they didn't know what to do, do you mean with you?

P.D. — They didn't know what to do with Baltimore.

AFRO — I understand that United is in the midst of negotiations with the Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Company (C & P) concerning the use of its equipment to build the system. Is that the hold-up at the present time?

P.D. — That's one thing, also the minority controlled company (Universal Telecom Inc.) has not been fulfilled/

AFRO — But isn't that delay also related to the ongoing C & P discussions?

P.D. — No, no there's a service agreement with UTI that requires that they be paid monthly starting with the date that the franchise was signed.

AFRO — How much is United suppose to pay UTI each month?

P.D. — I believe its a round figure of about $10,000 a month. United owed them a check on January 21 and again on February 21.

AFRO — Have they received that money to the best of your knowledge?

P.D. — None.

AFRO — Reportedly United Cable was late in paying $375,000 in fees to the city.

P.D. — In the agreement, they're called acceptance fees, but part of it is the security deposit and part of it is reinbursement fees to the city for the franchising process...those costs incurred by the city.

AFRO — Do you know why that payment was late?

P.D. — Yes, because the contract is between the city and United Cable Television of Baltimore but what United Cable did was in effect separate its self from the minority partners that it has here at UTI and sent them only three-quarters of what was required. The liability to the city is actually United's responsibility regardless of any other agreement they had for the minority controlled company to pay 25 percent of those liabilities.

AFRO — Are you saying essentially that United paid a portion of the $375,000 fee and left the rest to UTI to pay as part of an arrangement with the latter?

P.D. — Right, and the city apprised United that it wasn't that kind of a party...that they were to come up with 100 percent.

AFRO — Do you think your firing was a sort of punishment for being so vocal particularly to the press in the early stages?

P.D. — No I don't think so. I was the only black and local representative that United had and they were in a market that they were totally unfamiliar with and they were receiving unaccurate information especially about the black community.

AFRO — Were you told during the cable negotiations by your superiors to cease talking to the press during the negotiations?

P.D. — I was, and that was because a reporter had me saying something that I didn't say, and it sounded like a commitment from the company.

AFRO — Based on the comment you made earlier that United came to Baltimore almost with a "stickem-up" attitude, did you doubt their earnestness.

P.D. — The first indication of that was when we realized that we would be the only bidders and the proposal that Street and a team of consultants had been working on was scaled down to bare bones.

AFRO — What was different about that initial proposal and the one actually submitted to the city?

P.D. — Well there were certain so-called in the industry "giveaways" which make the proposal more attractive like institutional network, monies for public access.

AFRO — If there had been other companies bidding for the franchise some of these would have been included as "giveaways"?

P.D. — It would have been the franchising process for each company to make the sky the limit.

AFRO — But in the actual negotiations public access monies was one point the city had to struggle with United on.

P.D. — Well...such is the nature of negotiations.

AFRO — You mean that if there had been more than one company bidding that would have been a "giveaway"?

P.D. — It would have been more attractive and it wouldn't have been so hard fought.

AFRO — Isn't the fact that this is the first time United has had to negotiate with a city which is populated predominantly by blacks a point that made this a special market?

P.D. — Yes, one special aspect of Baltimore was that the population was majority black and that there were certain requirements that the community would have for anyone coming in.

AFRO — Was United surprised to find that the community was so adamant about that 25 percent minority ownership and that the mayor backed it? Did they think they could get around it?

P.D. — Yeah, yeah, they considered it and I was told that the minority issue was not that important. It would be the last thing we'd deal with and I kind of looked at the men that were talking to me, which were two lawyers and Sam Street, as if they had forgotten that I am part of the minority issue, being black and Baltimorean and...that I was the Director of Franchising...I was the one who was suppose to be able to tell them no its not that kind of party, the city requires this.

AFRO — As far as you can comment how much minority ownership did United want?

P.D. — Ah, at the risk of getting a reaction, as little as possible.

AFRO — Some critics have charged that your personal commitment to negotiating the minority ownership issue and the use of minority service contractors was not strong enough.

P.D. — Critics, you're kidding. There are a lot of people who know quite differently about how hard I have worked towards the minority interest being met. I can't imagine any critic saying that I did not have an interest in that aspect since from the beginning...one of the things that I was supposed to do that was very key to my hiring was to work on that aspect.

AFRO — Did United know about the city's MBE program?

P.D. — Yes. They had been told by sources and those sources are unnamed at this point even to me. But I knew somebody had to tell them this because...nobody was here but me...tell them that the city really didn't care about the minority business enterprise program. That they could get away with doing less.

AFRO — So you're suggesting that United Cable had a feeling they could get around this MBE requirement?

P.D. — Right. It seems to be the norm in the franchising process of the cable industry that you promise the municipalities anything and then you negotiate them down or you come up later on when you've begun to build and the cities are kind of caught with half their streets torn up and you say, well we can't fulfill this so let's renegotiate it, and rather than kick the company out completely people tend to give in.

AFRO — Who, United or the City, won the strategy battle here?

P.D. — The battle is still being waged.

AFRO — How receptive was the city to United during the negotiations?

P.D. — The city bent over backwards, this I got straight from management that was here Sam Street and the lawyers, to try to accomodate some of United's requirements.

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Reagan cuts force housing activists to seek funds

By Valerie Smith-Madden
AFRO Staff Writer

Because President Reagan's 1986 makes no monetary provisions for low-income housing, members of the housing advocate community met at a conference recently to examine alternative methods of funding.

The conference was sponsored by Dels. Howard "Pete" Rawlings and Anne Perkins and was held at Johns Hopkins University.

Legislative tactics in the battle include the introduction, of House Bills 725 and 726, both sponsored by the delegates.

House Bill 725 would establish a Rental Assistance Fund, and House Bill 726 would provide a steady source of money to the fund by adding two-tenths of a cent to the statewide property transfer tax.

According to Del. Rawlings, once the structure for Bill 726 is in place, "It will take on a life of its own."

Del. Perkins has introduced House Bill 722 which would collect a four-cent per gallon tax on the sale of leaded gasoline (until 1988) and funds generated from this tax would go to establish the Children's Lead Poisoning Prevention Fund.

The fund monies would be used by state and local agencies for loans and programs for lead abatement in housing for low income persons.

"The money would go back to communities with older houses to aid in the abatement of lead paint poisoning," said Ms. Perkins.

This afternoon (Friday) health care advocates will be listening intently to testimony before Del. Larry Young, chair of the House Environmental Committee, regarding House Bill 1561.

The bill deals with health care cost containment, specifically the matter of hospital mergers and consolidations.

Testimony in reference to this bill could have a direct impact on some city hospitals, Del. Young said.

The measure is one of seven contained in the governor's 1985 health care package.

RECOGNITION OF RACIAL JUSTICE MONTH

In recognition of Racial Justice Month, the YWCA of the Greater Baltimore Area, Inc. will present Maria BroomDance Bringer of Baltimore featuring "World Dancing" on Saturday, Feb. 23 at 8:00 p.m., at 128 W. Franklin St. The program will also feature Ademola Ekulona, performing poet.

For additional information, call 685-1460, ext. 361.

—Fired Cable exec

Continued from Page 6

AFRO — Did the city ever seem prepared to compromise on that 25 percent?

P.D. — Not ever. Never. Nope. The city solicitor made that very evident in his opening remarks before the negotiations. That this was one of the five major points that had to be solved ... the minority participation aspect was key.

AFRO — As business people go, would you say that the United people were people of integrity?

P.D. — You're asking me to make a value judgement of my ex-superiors. I'll be very honest, as business people go, Gene Schneider, (United's Chairman of the Board) and I could have had a lot better relationship if we had had more contact with each other. The man is bright...and he's a hardball player and I understood that.

AFRO — How would you characterize Sam Street and Fred Vierra?

P.D. — Fred Vierra is a people person. There was a little joke that all we needed to lose the franchise was to have Gene Schneider come here and make the presentation and the mayor and Gene Schneider would have just clicked it off and that would be the end of that.

AFRO — And Street?

P.D. — Sam Street is a gunslinger. A gunslinger is a person that operates almost in a commando form, he drops in and drops out, he's a franchiser. Sam Street was doing his job. He was my mentor. He told me at the airport interview when I asked him about the rudiments of franchising he said "I will be your mentor". The man has taught me well.

AFRO — Would you take on a similar role again.

P.D. — I don't think I'll do it again unless the price is very hefty...and certainly not in the place where I live because I found that position very very difficult.

AFRO — Why do you feel that way?

P.D. — My critics, if I can lend any merit to some of their perceptions, I can say that trying to do things that could have been perceived as counterproductive in a place where I lived, I couldn't be paid enough for it and I made that very clear to United. One thing I think United did appreciate about me I think was the integrity level. I didn't have a price.

AFRO — What was it about you that made you the person to represent United and try to sell the idea of cable television to Baltimore?

P.D. — Well, they had received a very high recommendation from Sam Daniels who was the only black involved. Sam told me that if I performed to the capabilities that he knew I had, that the deal would come together.

AFRO — Did you ever get discouraged?

P.D. — There were some times of discouragement because they really did not understand what I was trying to tell them. It was blacks are blacks everywhere, what's so big about blacks, blacks won't do anything and look at the community they're not saying anything. I went out into the community and asked people not to give cable a hard time or just let me try to pull this together.

AFRO — Where your actions to keep the community reaction down possibly misunderstood?

P.D. — It may have been. I did not hear. I got nothing but encouragement from the community leaders and politicians...everybody was very supportive. I went to a lot of people for information and help as to what I could do to bring United into compliance to make their offer real, including putting together two minority companies both CCSI (Cable Contracting Services Inc.) and UTI.

AFRO — Do you think given the fact that Baltimore has a 60 percent black population that United needed a black up front to sell its franchise?

P.D. — When they hired me, Sam Street said that Gene Schneider did not want a token and I said don't worry about it you won't have one.

AFRO — Did you feel like you had been placed in a "token" position?

P.D. — I did not see myself as a token initially. I was naive enough to believe that. But I still had to manage the other operations...and be involved with the entire community black and white.

AFRO — Where you expected to answer questions specifically related to the black community?

P.D. — As far as having an understanding of any kind of barometer of the black community, they looked to me for that but a lot of times what I told them was just shirked off as black politics and not really important. As a matter of fact they received correspondences from other people saying that, and this is what I had to fight because there were all white people that were saying this.

AFRO — A point was raised recently concerning UTI, it seems that your home address is listed as the firm's address.

P.D. — How that happened was at the time I had a vacancy upstairs...and we had examined the idea of maybe their renting that space for a couple of months while we organized. Since I was...instrumental in organizing...making sure this vehicle was in place so that United would be in compilance and not lose the franchise, I used my address as the principal office because no one could seem together as to where they wanted this principal address to be.

AFRO — Do you think that fact could be considered to be misleading?

P.D. — They're not actually working out of my residence it was used for the paperwork. They've been holding board meetings at a office on St. Paul Street.

AFRO — A comment was made outside the City Council chambers recently that suggested that you were just a front for United, what do you have to say on that?

P.D. — I did not front for United and that was not the agreement between United and me...that's not my perception and that was not what I was told. If I had thought that that's what I was I would not have been doing the job and its as simple as that.

AFRO — Will you own stock in UTI?

P.D. — I really don't know if I'm interested.

AFRO — About your being fired are you angry about that?

P.D. — Slightly.

AFRO — Do you feel you were used?

P.D. — Yeah I do. I really do.

AFRO: — Is there anything in the franchise agreement that could come back to haunt Baltimore down the road?

P.D. — Let's say...I'd rather say I don't see it and hope that I don't.

AFRO — Do you feel that there is a need for a regulatory commission to oversee cable t.v.

P.D. — Most definitely I do.

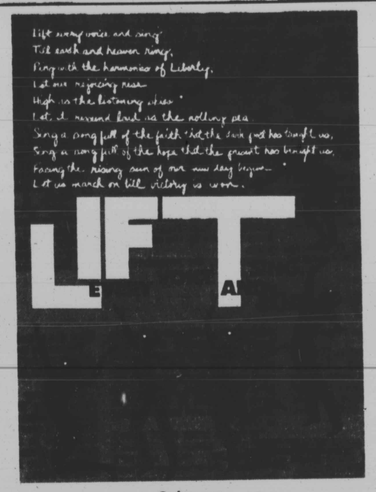
If asked to serve on that commission, would you?

P.D. — I'd consider it. I feel somewhat responsible for United being here.

AFRO — Does the firing of United's minority recruiter send a signal to the black community about the firm's sincerity on the matter of equitable hiring practices?

P.D. — I would say that the entire city itself, all communities involved, should be vigilante.

Lite Beer celebrates Black History Month.



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