
Special Awardee

Brown Shoe takes strategic steps toward diversity

2006 Corporate Diversity Awardee

By Meliqueica Meadows
Of the St. Louis American

With 1,300 retail stores throughout the U.S. and Canada and sought-after brands like Via Spiga, Naturalizer and Buster

Brown, it's no surprise that Brown Shoe has a diverse customer base. And to serve that customer base, the company – the recipient of the 2006 Corporate Diversity Award – needs a diverse workforce.

“We, as an organization, recognize that the best way to serve our diverse customers is with a diverse workforce,” Geoffrey Green, director of talent acquisitions at Brown Shoe, said.

“Also in being a fashion company, creativity is what we thrive on. The more different types of people we get together the more diverse ideas we get.”

The 127-year-old St. Louis-based company boasts annual sales of \$2.3 billion. And with nearly 700 employees, diversity is key to success.

Brown Shoe is committed to providing a work environment where all people are valued and treated with respect. It is also a company that believes in diversity and community partnerships.

“We don't manage diversity by quantities or numbers or percentages,” Green said. “We just make sure that we're totally inclusive and looking at people with all types of backgrounds, ethnicities and experience.

Brown Shoe has partnered with several minority organizations including the Jackie Robinson Foundation scholars and locally participates in the annual job fair hosted by the Black MBAs in an effort to recruit diverse talent.

“It's good for us because at the Black MBA Job Fair they have special criteria for entrants,” Green said. “They have to at least have a college degree, which means the caliber of talent is above that which you would find at typical job fairs.”

For the past two years Brown Shoe has partnered with deserving organizations such as the St. Louis Public Schools. This



Photo by Wiley Price

Dorothy Allen, Employee Communications Manager, was hired in 2005 through Brown Shoe's partnership with the Professional Organization of Women (POW).

year Brown Shoe donated 200 pairs of free shoes at the annual Back to School rally. Brown Shoe employees like Dorothy Allen, measured children's feet and allowed them to pick out their own pair of Buster Brown shoes.

“I loved seeing the smiles on their faces,” Allen said. “I was very happy to be a part of that. I'm proud to work for an organization that gives back to the community, especially when it involves helping children.”

Allen, in fact, was hired by Brown Shoe through the company's partnerships with the Professional Organization of Women (POW). Allen is the current employee communications manager and

Brown Shoe sponsors the organization's meetings at its Clayton headquarters.

This fall, Brown Shoe sponsored 10 Jackie Robinson Foundation scholars (four from St. Louis) during the annual Gateway Classic Weekend. Drake McCrary, the former Jackie Robinson Foundation scholar hired by Brown Shoe and placed in the company's accelerated career track program, served as a host.

The company also sponsored the Jackie Robinson Foundation scholars' alumni weekend in Las Vegas. The company sponsored the first alumni weekend last year in Miami and partnered with the Jackie Robinson Foundation to underwrite the tuition of St. Louis native Fred

Shelton III tuition to Morehouse College.

And in terms of diversity, Green said, “We are looking to do more things in the future.” The company is currently in talks with the Black Retailers Action Group (BRAG) and in the future hopes to partner with the St. Louis Metropolitan Urban League to help sponsor some of the organization's events when the Urban League's national convention comes to St. Louis in 2007.

Brown Shoe also recruits heavily from Howard University and maintains active partnerships with the National Association of Black Accountants (NABA) and the St. Louis Business Diversity Initiative.