



Otis Ducker

In Tune with Diversity

When Dorian Parreott came up to the podium to accept an award on behalf of his local at the 96th Convention of the American Federation of Musicians (AFM) in 2005, it was an historic moment in the life of his union.

Parreott—the first African-American president of his central New Jersey local—naturally was proud that Local 399 was the first local to receive the newly created President’s Award for diversity activity.

What was even more important, he says, is that “the union recognized that diversity in leadership and bringing in more people of color can help every local grow and be stronger and more stable, as it did ours.”

The AFM Diversity Committee launched the biennial awards program—which also includes awards for advocacy and youth involvement—as part of a plan to make the union of musicians more in tune with diversity.

The roots of that plan grew out of extensive discussions in 2002 between then-new AFM International President Thomas F. Lee

and Otis Ducker, a long-time activist from Lee’s home local in Washington, DC.

Ducker agreed to become chair of a new Diversity Committee. In contrast to the existing Diversity Council, the new panel would be a standing convention committee, would meet regularly between conventions and receive funding so it could develop and implement programs.

“The 2003 convention put this change into the bylaws along with a strong diversity mission statement, one with teeth,” he says. The committee will still be able to function, Ducker points out, even if a future president were to be less supportive of its work.

The 14-member committee comprises many local leaders from around the United States and Canada. “We made sure to have people with both knowledge of how the union works and clout,” Ducker says.

Ducker, who joined the AFM International Executive Board in 2006, has a great deal of experience in bringing people together. After serving 14 years in a variety of leadership roles for segregated Local 710 in

Washington, he chaired a merger committee that united it with the then-all-white Local 161 in 1967.

The combined local was then able to be more effective in helping all musicians, and Ducker believes that the growing interest in the diversity awards is helping AFM “to be proud of the fact that we are one of the most diverse unions in the country.”

“This union now sees diversity as part of its core and a significant part of the way of life of our organization,” he says. “Our union is—and will continue to grow—much stronger as a result.”



Dorian Parreott