By Rebecca Rivas
Of The St. Louis American

In early April, officials at the St. Louis County Department of Public Health made a grim realization: the region would need a temporary morgue for anticipated deaths from COVID-19. The project cost almost $1.67 million, with St. Louis County paying more than $1.13 million, and St. Louis City paying $551,000. But, like so many other aspects of the COVID-19 crisis, business contracts went to minority firms.

A joint investigation between the St. Louis American and Type Investigations found that African-American contractors earned only a tiny fraction of the publicly-financed construction dollars available. Despite a county law requiring 24 percent of contract dollars go to minority-owned business enterprises (MBEs), less than $1,000 was awarded.

If minority businesses had received 24 percent of contract dollars, they would have earned nearly $400,000.

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In fact, officials at the St. Louis County Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, which oversees compliance with the county’s inclusion law, acknowledged the morgue’s construction, in violation of protocol. The director of the inclusion office said her team learned about the morgue from a news broadcast.

“Certainly, this year is unprecedented in all we do, and this calls for an unprecedented approach in rallying the community behind United Way,” said Steward.

Kwame raising scholarship funds without golf

Four power hitters to lead United Way Campaign

By Chris King
Of The St. Louis American

As our region and neighbors face unprecedented challenges and the call for racial equity, our support of United Way and its work is more critical than ever,” Steward said.

The needs of our college-bound students continue in significant ways,” said Kim Thompson, executive director of The Kwame Foundation and co-founder along with Anthony (Tony) Thompson, CEO of Kwame Building Group.

For more information on Kwame Foundation, visit www.kwamefoundation.org or call (314) 754-5619.

Lucas named principal of Hanna Woods Elementary

Will replace retiring
Krisy Roberts,
effective July 1

Carletia Lucas has been selected as the principal of Parkway’s Hanna Woods Elementary, effective July 1. She replaces Krisy Roberts, who is retiring.

Lucas currently serves as principal of Highcroft Ridge Elementary. She previously served as assistant principal at both Highcroft Ridge and Ross Elementary schools.

Because of the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, The Kwame Foundation has canceled its 15th annual fundraiser, The Greens, which brings in tens of thousands of dollars each year for scholarships for four-generation, college-bound students. The Kwame Foundation, a 501(c)3 organization, is fundraising online on its website to continue that work.

Donations can be made at www.kwamefoundation.org.

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Four power hitters to lead United Way Campaign

Steward, Osborn, Pennington and Baxter are 2020 spokespersons

Their campaign typically has two chairpersons. This campaign has spokespersons — and they are power hitters by any standard.

Those four spokespersons are David Steward, founder and chairman of World Wide Technology; Kathy Osborn, president and CEO of the Regional Business Council; Penny Pennington, managing partner of Edward Jones; and Warner Baxter, chairman, president, and CEO of AmTrust Corporation.

“As our region and neighbors face unprecedented challenges and impacts amid the COVID-19 crisis and the call for racial equity, our support of United Way and its work is more critical than ever,” Steward said.

In fact, officials at the St. Louis County Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, which oversees compliance with the county’s inclusion law, acknowledged the morgue’s construction, in violation of protocol. The director of the inclusion office said her team learned about the morgue from a news broadcast.

“We are reaching out to our community partners about this new development,” Osborn said.

United Way leads our community in supporting and maintaining our region’s safety net nonprofits to help keep our neighbors whole,” Pennington said.

“Through United Way, thousands of people in our community receive vital resources, like food, shelter, mentorship for young people, job training, and so much more,” said Baxter.

United Way’s Board Chair Michael Mochos noted how unique of a situation it is to have four key leaders unite to lead the campaign.

“Today it’s more important than ever that these in our community who can support this work step up and continue to do so,” Osborn said.

“This year is unprecedented in all we do, and this calls for an unprecedented approach in rallying the community behind United Way,” said Steward.

See UNITED WAY, A12

See UNITED WAY, A12
Morgue

Continued from A1

June 15, 1866 — about 375 were African American. Black residents of St. Louis County are dying from COVID-19 at almost twice the rate of white residents: 77 per 100,000, compared to 42 per 100,000 for white residents. The African American community is disproportionately dying because of COVID, and we needed to ensure that our businesses didn’t fold up as well as us,” said Yohett E. Adams, executive director for MOKAN, an advocacy group for minority contractors.

St. Louis County isn’t the only place where minority-owned businesses have been left out of contracts for emergency building funded through the CARES Act. Throughout the country, temporary facilities for hospital overflow were built quickly and well, and it appears that minority contractors were left out as well. About $721.6 million has been spent on building nearly 160 facilities nationwide. The African American companies earned $26.2 million, or about 3.5 percent of those dollars. Black-owned companies earned $66,656 in contracts — or 0.0009 percent.

Since the African American businesses had asked for these dollars, Black-owned companies earned $26.2 million, or about 3.5 percent of those dollars. Black-owned companies earned $66,656 in contracts — or 0.0009 percent.

“It would have been livid, we tend to know the outcome before it happens,” said Thomas. “If it’s not stressed in the bidding process, then that’s when we notice something is0.

But what was not executed was the community about the morgue project. Erby, director of the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion brought the team to the table. The businesses that were contracted have been around a long time and knew how to employ minority contractors, he said. Tony Thompson, of Kwame Building Group, said: “It’s a total disaster for us.”

“Small businesses are getting access to food, medicine and mental health support. Sometimes the minority- or women-owned firms backed up by the City of St. Louis, but not to most any other entity,” said Jackson. “And that subcontractor agrees to serve the end users of any of the services. The city and with other public entities and programs would never have got off the ground.”

“A lot of these big projects — even the minority participation requirements, obviously, and the issue is not knowing the terms. Thomas said. “Our position was that, negotiate the contract, to either could agree to include the minority- or women-owned firm in the contract, with the city, which includes the minority-inclusion stipulation. Rainbow’s supplier, Butler Supply, accounted for all of the project’s women-owned business participation in the project — which was 4.2 percent.

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