



**Laura Henderson**  
Entrepreneur



**Viola O. Baskerville**  
Commonwealth of Virginia, Secretary of Administration



**Luwanda W. Jenkins**  
Maryland Governor's Office of Minority Affairs, Special Secretary

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# BUSINESS LEGEND AND SPECIAL ADVOCACY AWARD FOR 2009

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**A**ccording to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, a legend is a person whose fame promises to be enduring. The Business Legends Award honors MBEs whose legacies will endure for many years to come because of the continued long-term success of their businesses and their high-level of contributions in ensuring the success of others.

Our Legends have been chosen for their business acumen, performance excellence, courageous thinking and actions, vision and innovation, inspiring leadership, community mindedness, and their constant willingness to help those who follow. They have attained legendary status through their ability to succeed despite the daunting obstacles in their paths. They encountered a hostile, inhospitable business climate and became pioneers, trailblazing the road to change and equality in the business community. They've helped stabilize neighborhoods, provided support for hundreds of employees, and created legacies for their families.

Finally, this year we are introducing a new award category, the Special Advocacy Award. Special Advocacy Awards are for those individuals who spend their careers in pursuit of influencing outcomes — including public-policy and resource allocation decisions within political, economic, and social systems and institutions — that directly affect the minority business community. The winners of the 2009 Special Advocacy Awards Viola Baskerville, and Luwanda Jenkins, two women, whose advocacy on behalf of MBE's at the local, state and national levels, has significantly contributed to the ability of MBEs to play on a more level field.

## Laura Henderson

# DOING WELL BY DOING GOOD



Growing up in the segregated south ignited Laura Henderson's passion for fairness.

"I loved the janitor at the newspaper where my father worked", she said, "I remember being shocked when I found out he couldn't use the same rest room or go to many of the same places that White people could."

Henderson, whose father was a linotype operator, and whose mother was a bookkeeper at the bank saw evidence of unfairness all around her.

"I became impassioned to help those people who were unable to fulfill their full potential for reasons that had nothing to do with them--whether it is their race, religion, gender, or sexual orientation. Imagine what the world could be like if everyone had the opportunity to work up to their abilities."

Making the world a fairer and better place became the impetus and theme of Henderson's career. After graduation from King College, she worked in a couple of jobs as an administrative assistant. When these jobs failed to satisfy her, she decided to move to Washington D.C. in hope that a big city would provide the opportunities she could not find in N.C.

After a stint in a non-profit, Henderson began working in a company that did communications work for the National Institutes of Health. After four months on the job, she was promoted to division head. After three years on the job she took her division (15 employees), an NIH contract (equivalent to three weeks of work), and some money from her employer and started her own business.

"The owners of the business had a direction in mind that they pursued single-mindedly", she remembers. "Unfortunately, that direction was not making any money. My division was the company's cash cow. I got tired of getting so little return on all of the revenue I generated, and tired of watching the profits my division made fuel the seemingly fruitless direction they were taking."

This proved to be a pivotal action in Henderson's life. By the end of her first fiscal year in business, Prospect Associates had 45 employees and \$1.5 million in revenue. When Henderson sold her company, nine years ago, she had 200 employees and was generating more than \$20 million in annual sales.

"I guess I was like most young entrepreneurs", she said. "I vacillated between feeling vulnerable because I was responsible for the well-being of my employees, and supreme confidence that I would be successful."

Prospect Associates is an example of a company that did exactly what Henderson always wanted to do. Her contracts, mostly for NIH, allowed her to make enough money for her family and her retirement while "doing good," by empowering people by providing them with critical information about their diseases so they could make informed medical choices.

Her health communications and biomedical research firm received many awards, both for the quality of its work product and for the innovative approaches to organizational development and human resource development. Prospect Associates was recognized by Inc. magazine as one of the "Best Small Companies to Work for in America." In 1995, NAWBO named her National Woman Business Owner of the Year.

Henderson's advocacy on behalf of women business owners dates back to the mid 1980's. She was one of the strategic leaders who spearheaded the introduction and passage of the Women's Business Ownership Act (HR 50-50). She volunteered a senior employee to write testimony for women business owners and testified herself on behalf of the act. The Capital Area NAWBO named her "National Advocate of the Year" in 1988.

One of her most significant achievements was her role as founder of the Center for Women's Business Research. Henderson joined with Gillian Rudd to found the organization and was the Chair for three years. She led the early strategic planning sessions and was instrumental in establishing the organization as the premier source of statistics and data on women business owners and their enterprises – data which has provided input for much of the legislation on behalf of women's entrepreneurship and the rationale for launching numerous women business owner organizations including Women President's Organization (WPO), Women's Business Enterprise Council (WBENC), the expansion of NAWBO and Enterprising Women.

For many years, Henderson was the single largest contributor to the Center for Women's Business Research and also served as its banker before the organization could get a line of credit. She was the founder of the Center's popular Gillian Rudd Leadership Institute for Women Business Owners, one of the first leadership institutes to focus on women who led established growing businesses. She served as a coach and inspiration for women business owners through the Leadership Institute and informally whenever a woman business owner asked for help. She continues to guide the Center for Women's Business Research as Chair Emeritus.

Henderson has been an advocate for women's entrepreneurship for many years, testifying before Congress and speaking in key venues. It was her speech to a group of bankers hosted by the Comptroller of the Currency in 1993 that led the bankers to say "This information will change the way we do business" and indeed, it did.

She also has been a leader and advocate on behalf of all small business, particularly in the areas of government procurement. Through her leadership of the Professional Services Council and National Small Business United, she advocated for and testified on behalf of small businesses and women-owned businesses for government procurement. She also served on the National Women's Business Council.

It is clear, however, that the role Henderson loves most is that of mother to her two sons. She is extremely close to them and proud of their successes. Her younger son is a college senior majoring in philosophy and fine arts, her older son is an engineer and physicist.

Four months after Henderson sold her business, a careless driver ran through a red light and Henderson's injuries from the ensuing accident have required eight surgeries. She is in near constant pain. Despite this Henderson stays active on the boards of several organizations and by advising and coaching women business owners on an individual basis.

## Viola O. Baskerville

# NOW GIVING OTHERS A BETTER CHANCE



In 1963, at the height of the civil rights movement, 23 headmasters of selective independent schools made a mutual commitment to change the profiles and compositions of their student bodies. Through *A Better Chance Program*, they would broaden their enrollment to include “students of color” who were economically disadvantaged but academically able. Chosen for their motivation and demonstrated achievement, 55 students from low-income families were selected to complete their secondary education at these founding independent schools.

One of the first participants in *A Better Chance Program* was 13 year old Viola Baskerville nee Osborne who left her parents and siblings, including an identical twin sister, in her native Richmond Virginia, to enroll in the ultra-exclusive Northfield School for Girls. This began the journey of learning and service that continues to be the hallmark of Secretary Viola Osborne Baskerville’s life. With classmates at Northfield including singer Natalie Cole, and a myriad of other future politicians, ambassadors, entertainers and business leaders, Baskerville is proud to have been recognized by the school with a distinguished alumni award for public service.

“Until I got to high school”, Baskerville said, “I wanted to be a race car driver. I was always fascinated with cars.”

As Virginia’s Secretary of Administration, and the only African American female on the Governor’s cabinet, one of Baskerville’s primary missions is to implement and enforce Governor Kaine’s Executive Order requiring a goal that 40% of state contracting dollars to be spent with small businesses.

Baskerville is justifiably proud of Virginia’s progress, “Even in these tough economic times”, she says, “our state agencies are making it happen. The latest statistics show we are exceeding the Governor’s goal”

In appointing Baskerville to his cabinet, following her position as the co-chair of his transition team, Kaine, a fellow Richmond City councilperson said, “Viola Baskerville impressed me as one of the hardest working members of city council when we served together in Richmond. She has continued to show that work ethic and that commitment to making government work more efficiently and serve its citizens better as a member of the House.”

Baskerville entered politics after several years as of being involved in community issues while she was a stay-at-home mom. At the urging of many community leaders, she ran for Richmond City Council, unseating a 12-year incumbent.

Baskerville has always advocated for the underdog. During her stint as Richmond City Councilwoman, where she was also elected Vice Mayor, and her seven year seat in Virginia’s House of Delegates, her pro-small business voting record stands for itself. Additionally, she has always been passionate about education. Her most noted achievement as a state legislator was the introduction and passage of a bill providing scholarships for the “lost generation” of Prince Edward County’s African American students.

“As a result of the *Brown* decision in 1959 Prince Edward County closed all their public schools rather than integrate them.” she explained. “Prince Edward County Public Schools remained closed for five years. The \$1 million in scholarships the state provided, plus an additional \$1 million I solicited from a private donor have allowed these former students, many of them now grandparents, to finally receive their GED’s, and in some cases attend college.”

Baskerville was always an academic superstar. After her graduation from Northfield, she received a Bachelor’s degree from the College of William and Mary and, was awarded a Fulbright Fellowship to study in women in literature in Bonn, Germany. She was William and Mary’s first minority student to receive this award. Later, with a newborn baby in tow, she earned a law degree from the University Of Iowa College Of Law.

Baskerville credits her education at Northfield for her ability to successfully interact with people from all cultures and races.

“The student population at Northfield was very diverse, she said. We had many international students and I quickly learned to adapt. During my travels it has always interested me to see how other people and institutions were dealing with diversity.”

Baskerville is an enthusiastic genealogist. She has traced her father’s family back to England in 1555, and her mother’s family to 1790, in Hanover County Virginia. From birth, her father, a disabled World War II veteran, and carpenter, and her mother instilled in their children the value of education.

“My mother was a rebel”, she fondly remembers. “She was the youngest girl in a large family and she actually started college at Virginia Union in 1939. Unfortunately she had to drop out to take care of my grandmother, who became very ill. My mother was wearing pants long before it was socially acceptable for women to do so.”

It is no surprise that Baskerville’s role model is California Congresswoman Maxine Waters. Baskerville says, “Waters is gutsy, she makes sure her information is accurate and then she takes a stand. And when she takes a stand, she doesn’t back down.”

While at William and Mary, Baskerville met her husband, noted Richmond cardiologist Dr. Archer Baskerville, who was one of two African American students in the School of Medicine. In January they will celebrate their 35th wedding anniversary. They have raised two successful sons. Both are following Baskerville’s example; one is a practicing attorney, the other is a teacher.

The Virginia law limits a Governor to only one consecutive term and Governor Kane’s term will expire this year. Of course this means that Baskerville will have to resign from her position. Baskerville hopes her legacy will be the state agencies’ newfound knowledge that “collaborative efforts produce results”. Faced with many options, Baskerville is uncertain what her future will hold. Perhaps she’ll have more time for her genealogy hobby, or to spend at or on the water she loves. She does know, however, that she will continue to be an active advocate for adult education and minority business enterprises.

## Luwanda W. Jenkins

# TAKE TWO



The first time Governor O' Malley's transition team called Luwanda Jenkins to request that she consider taking the job of Special Secretary for the Governor's Office of Minority Affairs, she told them she wasn't interested. After all, the central theme of Jenkins' career had always been that of a trailblazer, i.e., being the first person to occupy a newly established job. She was not sure she wanted a return engagement to state government, and she was already enjoying her position at CareFirst. However, when the transition team called her again a few months later she decided to accept.

"They called back right after the Don Imus incident", she said, "and I realized, all over again, how prejudice against black women was still a major problem in our society. As part of the Governor's cabinet I would have a more visible platform on which to help mitigate this issue. I was also very impressed by the sincere commitment both the Governor and Lt. Governor Brown have toward ensuring the success of woman and minority owned businesses."

Jenkins is a hometown girl. She is a graduate of Baltimore's Western High School, the oldest all-girl high school in the United States. She credits the education she received at Western with her success saying, "The school instilled upon young women a sense of excellence, a sense that our future was wide open and that we could do anything. They gave us confidence and the expectation that we would serve others."

Jenkins intended to major in journalism at Towson University, but after coming in second to Washington Post columnist Michelle Singletary in a scholarship competition, she switched her major to mass communications. During college she interned in the press office of then Mayor William Donald Schaefer, a role she parleyed into a full-time position after graduation. While working on an event for the Mayor, she met a high ranking official at Provident Bank who asked her to join the bank as their first public relations manager.

"This was during the savings and loan crisis", she remembers, "I found myself standing on the sidewalk talking to reporters, answering questions about the viability of Provident Bank. Also, this was about the time when ATMs were first opening, so I had two very high-profile issues to deal with."

As a result of her professional handling of these tough issues, Jenkins was promoted to bank officer. It was there she met her husband, Bryant, who was also an officer at the bank. Soon after marriage Jenkins was offered a job as the first manager of Maryland's Office of Tourism for DBED.

Jenkins successfully steered the Office of Tourism toward cultural tourism, promoting Maryland's rich African American culture. While defending her office's budget before the state House of Delegate's Appropriations Committee, she came to the attention of the man that would become her "godfather", the late state delegate Howard Peters "Pete" Rawlings.

"Pete was known for taking promising African American young people under his wing and making sure they got higher profiles. This was actually not the first time I met Pete. I grew up in his district.

Jenkins came to rely on Rawlings' advice and guidance and was honored when, at his suggestion, then-Governor Schaefer offered her the job as the Director of the Governor's Office of Minority Affairs.

"My marching orders were to create a new, stronger identity for GOMA and to forge relationships with the other state agencies. This was a tall order since I only had a staff of three people and a very tiny budget."

During her tenure the state's MBE law sunset and Jenkins found herself fighting a bitter battle, not only to ensure that the state renew the law, but also to raise the state's MBE goal from 10 to 17%.

Jenkins left state government to take a job as the first Director of Community Relations at the Baltimore Sun. Remembering her first career goal, journalism, Jenkins eagerly accepted. Jenkins hallmark in this position was her creation of the "Reading by 9" Program, a city-wide program to encourage children to learn to read by the age of 9. Jenkins still gets excited about the program's accomplishments, including expanding the program to work with adult literacy groups to help parents.

"I find I am the most effective," says Jenkins, "when I am working on a cause. Like the MBE issue, the literacy issue excited and inspired me. It's important for me to know that my contributions are making a difference."

Jenkins stellar performance was recognized by her mentor in the Greater Baltimore Leadership program. This mentor recruited Jenkins for a job managing community outreach efforts at CareFirst. What drew Jenkins to this job was a chance to work for an African American CEO, and the challenge of working on another worthy cause—health care disparity.

It was there that Governor O'Malley's team found her.

Jenkins said, "The MBE program is in much better shape than it was when I held the job the first time. Thanks to Sharon Pinder our visibility has increased and there are many more resources available to get my job done."

Jenkins works hard, but tries to make quality time to spend with her husband, who works for the Maryland Department of Economic Development, as well as her two teenage children and her mother, who at age 72 still works part-time at Sears Department Store, a job she's held for 25 years. One of the reasons Jenkins is so ardent about the success of MBEs is her late father's experience as owner of a small grocery store in Baltimore.

A committed advocate and volunteer, Jenkins has served on the boards and committees of several organizations including the Maryland/DC Minority Supplier Development Council, and YWCA of Central Maryland. She has received numerous awards, including the Maryland's Top 100 Women, and Towson University's Distinguished Black Marylander, National Association of Minority Contractors and the African American Tourism Council of Maryland.

She is a graduate of the Greater Baltimore Committee's Leadership Program and the University of Maryland's Howard P. Rawlings Leadership Program for Public Sector Leaders and in addition to her degree in mass communications from Towson State University; she has a master's degree in administrative science from the Johns Hopkins University.

"I try to remind folks that Maryland's MBE environment is a national model. We have wonderful, dedicated advocates who are going to continue to fight the battle till the finish. However, there are still many obstacles and cultural biases that need to be abolished" Jenkins says. "If I could leave just one legacy it would be that there is no longer a need for GOMA or an MBE program. My wish is for Maryland to have a clear culture where MBEs are part of the mainstream and there is no need for carve-outs or special opportunities. MBE's would be getting opportunities because of the value they bring to the table."