

Woman Honored for Adding Art to the Office

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Valerie Cooper, Cooper, president of Stamford-based Picture That LLC, an art consulting company that aids corporations with art purchase and lease programs, art advice and curating has been honored for her work. Cooper won the National Minority Supplier Development Council 2008 Supplier of the Year Award for the Northeast region last month in Las Vegas. (Paul Desmarais/Staff photo)

Valerie Cooper's talents in spicing up the walls of major corporations has not gone unnoticed.

Cooper, president of Stamford-based Picture That LLC, has won the National Minority Supplier Development Council (NMSDC) 2008 Supplier of the Year Award for the Northeast region.

She was presented the award last month at the council's Conference and Business Opportunity Fair in Las Vegas. Cooper was among 16 minority suppliers who received the award in their respective regions.

"It feels wonderful. This was the first time I've been recognized on a national level. It's still a little unbelievable. There were so many qualified companies," Cooper said.

Picture That is an art consulting company that aids corporations with art purchase and lease programs, art advice and curating.

Cooper, a Stamford resident, founded her company in 2002 after a 15-year stint with Goldman Sachs, where she was vice president of technology and senior vice president of workplace diversity.

Nominations for this annual award come from various industries. Nominees are judged on business growth and performance, community service and the ability to overcome challenges.

"Entrepreneurs like Valerie Cooper and other minority business owners are an important part of the economic fabric of their communities," said Harriet Michel, president of the NMSDC headquarters in New York City. "In addition to providing products and services to corporations, these outstanding business leaders also provide employment opportunities and act as anchors in their communities through philanthropic and volunteer leadership."

The winners were divided into four classes based on annual sales. Cooper was recognized in Class 1 with sales under \$1 million. Her company had sales of \$247,000 last year, and she anticipates sales reaching about \$400,000 this year.

Though the nation is experiencing an economic downturn, Cooper said Picture That is doing well. She has work booked through June and said that since receiving her accolade she has had more inquiries.

"We do a lot around diversity heritage and we're small," said Cooper, who has three employees and outsources work when needed.

Her company updates the fine arts gallery at General Electric in Fairfield on a bi-monthly basis and hosts receptions there so artists can interact with employees. She also is setting up online galleries for GE, similar to the Hispanic Heritage exhibit she did for the company, allowing GE employees in other regions to take virtual

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tours of the gallery at GE headquarters.

Other Picture That clients include Stamford-based Pitney Bowes, Goldman Sachs Group, Northeast Utilities, Travelers, Thompson Hospitality and Cartus Corp. in Danbury, which was Cooper's first client. The company nominated her for the award.

"Cartus is enormously pleased to have played a small part in the honor accorded to Valerie Cooper and Picture That," said Kevin Kelleher, president and chief executive officer of Cartus. "Valerie's aesthetic contributions to our workplace are invaluable and play an important part in helping Cartus foster the diverse work environment that's so vital to our employees. As Picture That's first corporate client, we are very proud of our association with Valerie and her team and of our record of support for minority suppliers."

Cooper, a past recipient of the Connecticut Supplier of the Year Award, was deserving of the regional honor, said Fred McKinney, president of Connecticut Minority Supplier Development Council in Hamden, which will soon become the New England Minority Supplier Development Council.

Picture That is one of three Connecticut business honored by the national council in the last two years.

"Valerie came to her business with a great deal of corporate experience, and that has helped her navigate because doing business with large corporations is not that easy. The success or failure of a small business or minority business hinges on the relationships that they have with larger organization, and she does an excellent job," McKinney said.

Cooper would like to expand her services globally. She also hopes to gain a footing with corporations as they develop projects, like the Royal Bank of Scotland complex on Washington Boulevard in Stamford.

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