

## Website aids minority job seekers

By Kim Leonard

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### Photos



Robert L. Johnson

### About the writer

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Black Entertainment Television founder Robert L. Johnson said on Wednesday that several major Pittsburgh-area employers have signed on to post their open positions through OppsPlace.com, his new online network for minority job seekers and minority-owned businesses.

The website debuted Feb. 13, but yesterday's introduction at a Downtown event with Vibrant Pittsburgh, an organization that promotes opportunities for minorities and women, is the first time that a group of companies has joined the effort, he said.

Nearly 40 companies have joined OppsPlace.com and Johnson, whose The RLJ Companies of Bethesda, Md., owns hotels, auto dealerships, entertainment and other businesses. He hopes to have at least 100 involved within the next year.

"OppsPlace is designed to do everything to harness the power of the Internet, and harness the commitment that all of us should have and share about diversity and inclusion, to make sure that this country gives everybody a chance," Johnson said.

About 2,000 job seekers have registered so far, and individuals and businesses seeking opportunities pay no fees to use the network. Corporations and other major employers posting jobs pay \$40,000 a year, and the site is designed to earn advertising revenue.

Local companies involved are The Bank of New York Mellon Corp., Education Management Corp., FedEx Ground, Giant Eagle Inc., Highmark Inc., PNC Financial Services Group Inc., PPG Industries Inc., UPMC and U.S. Steel Corp.

Johnson invested "a couple million" dollars to start OppsPlace.com, said Traci Oley Blunt, a spokeswoman with The RLJ Companies.

Across the United States, the jobless rate among African Americans runs about double the overall rate, or about 16 to 17 percent, Johnson said.

With the black and Hispanic populations growing and likely to become the largest U.S. population group over the next few decades, "how do we expect to be competitive against the growing, vast middle class that is emerging in India sub-Saharan Africa, throughout Southeast Asia and the world if a huge part of our talent is sitting on the sidelines?" he asked.

In addition to attracting talent to Western Pennsylvania, the site can open options elsewhere, Johnson said after the event.

"You have the globe as your opportunity," he said. "A student here in Pittsburgh can sign up to be on it. A small business in Pittsburgh can sign up, and they can find a job opportunity in New York."

Candi Castleberry-Singleton, UPMC's chief inclusion and diversity officer, said the health system is impressed with OppsPlace's organizers, and Johnson's "amazing reputation" will draw attention to the effort.

It's not just about putting UPMC's name on a jobs site: "The most important thing is that the website is going to produce talent that is actually one, willing to move to Pittsburgh and two, that we can hire," she said.

About 10 to 12 percent of the region's total population could be considered minorities, said Susan Suver, U.S. Steel's vice president of human resources.

"Because the diverse population here is relatively small, it pushes the question of 'If we want more diversity here, how do we bring it?'" she said.

"For U.S. Steel, OppsPlace is all about pushing our jobs out for minority candidates to see in all markets, including this one, and pulling minority candidates to us. It creates a connection point."

One-third of the steelmaker's U.S. workforce of 23,000 employees is composed of women or minorities, Suver said.

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