

A Diverse portfolio on Robinson Day

MLB's Diverse Business Partners honored in Atlanta

By Jon Cooper / Special to MLB.com



ATLANTA -- While Major League Baseball celebrated the 60th anniversary of Jackie Robinson's breaking of the color barrier in baseball on Sunday, Major League Baseball's Diverse Business Partners program illustrated just how far-reaching Robinson's impact was.

In a ceremony prior to Sunday afternoon's game between the Atlanta Braves and Florida Marlins at Turner Field, Clayton Judge, III, senior program manager of Diverse Business Partners, and Mike Plant, Atlanta Braves executive vice president/business operations, honored two of the team's top sponsors, Quality Communications and Atlanta Communications Company.



Braves director of special events Sabrina Jenkins stated that recipients of the award were chosen based on quality of service, not necessarily quantity, and that recognition for the both minority-owned businesses was long overdue.

"It wasn't necessarily how big of an order the Braves ordered with them but it was more so tenure," said Jenkins. "These two vendors have been on board with us for over 10 years. We've never recognized them in any way, shape or form. So we really wanted to take this opportunity with the first Jackie Robinson Supply Diversity Award to do so."

Jenkins also took the opportunity to show her gratitude to Robinson.

"Not only his career in baseball but the doors that he was able to open for all minorities," she said. "Even for myself, to be a member of the Braves' front office the past 15 years, without men like Jackie Robinson, Martin Luther King, or Hank Aaron, I wouldn't be standing here today in my position with the Atlanta Braves as director of special events. So I'm very honored, very proud."

Both James Butterfield, who accepted the award on behalf of Quality Communications, and Gwen Mitchell-Byrd, who accepted on behalf of Atlanta Communications Company, were grateful to Major League Baseball for the program that has helped put minority-owned programs on equal footing.

"The Braves and Major League Baseball have allowed our company to come in, as a small minority business, and be able to give a great service to the Braves," said Butterfield. "Currently we provide them service on their telecommunications during the actual game. It's an honor and we try to excel in all of the services we provide for them. It's a wonderful feeling. I wasn't expecting it. It's just a blessing."

"To have the Atlanta Braves recognize us in their commitment to the company has just been absolutely tremendous," added Mitchell-Byrd, President and CEO of Atlanta Communications, Co., which works with Braves security, providing two-way communications. "To have the affiliation with the Atlanta Braves and the recognition, it goes beyond words."

Mitchell-Byrd also expressed her gratitude to Robinson.

"Being an African-American female, to have that recognition, to go back and try to understand what that one individual did, his actions causing these things to occur decades later, it's just absolutely tremendous," she added. "I would just like to thank Jackie Robinson and the spirit that lives on that is continuously opening the doors for those of us that are able to take advantage of these opportunities."

Diverse Business Partners held ceremonies throughout the country Sunday, but Major League Baseball chose to send Judge to Atlanta.

"I told Clayton Judge, 'Thanks for coming.' Because they could have chosen 18 other cities to go to," said Jenkins. "It's very special and I'm glad that they chose Atlanta."

"Atlanta is special in so many different ways," said Judge. "Of course, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. exemplified the Civil Rights Movement and the struggle for African-Americans in the United States of America and what Jackie Robinson did helped assist in that movement. The Atlanta Braves organization has a great history of African-American players, with Hank Aaron and so on, but also their program, in terms of supply diversity, is one of the best that we have in Major League Baseball. They really are a standout program and we thought it essential that we represent Major League Baseball here with the Jackie Robinson Award."

Begun by Commissioner Bud Selig in 1998, the mission of Diverse Business Partners is to promote efficiency and profitability for Major League Baseball and its clubs while extending baseball's ability to contribute to the economic growth, strength and well-being of diverse communities.