

## **WIL Highlights for July 26, 2019**

### **“Service, Integrity and Legacy: What Leadership Means to Me” featuring Cheryl McAfee, Chairman & CEO of McAfee3 Architects**

**Summary:** It’s hard to imagine a more inspirational or compelling story than Cheryl McAfee’s life journey which she shared with the WIL attendees. She took us with her on an incredible journey of perseverance – bringing us sometimes to tears and other times, laughing with her. It started with her birth in Nebraska where she was the first “Negro” baby born in Lincoln General Hospital (but where her mother was not allowed to give birth in the same area of the hospital as white mothers) - through her early growing up years in Wichita, Kansas (where she participated in the desegregation of the local school system) - and on through her college years at Kansas State University (where she was tormented by her department head who tried repeatedly to get her to quit before receiving her undergraduate professional degree in architecture.) But guess, what? Cheryl didn’t quit, instead she excelled and was applauded and honored at her graduation by other students and faculty and she went on to Harvard to get her Master of Architecture degree in urban design. Fighting the good fight, she became a role model for how to stand up for herself and how to persevere against any obstacle or any form of discrimination.

As she reflected on her life from those early days to the present time, Cheryl definitely gave credit to her mother, father, other family members as well as incredible mentors for their influence and for the lessons she learned along the way, lessons which have helped shape the person and the leader she is today. Currently, she’s the principal of a national architectural firm which also includes her father and sister – and she’s also a leader who’s received multiple honors for her professional accomplishments as well as her service to the community. Cheryl works as hard as ever to be the best at her profession and she’s passionately committed to helping others and leading with respect and integrity. There’s no doubt that her legacy as an architect has already been established, but Cheryl looks forward to the next big project and what the future has in store. One thing we know for sure, she’ll continue to inspire everyone who knows her to keep going despite the obstacles, to be true to yourself, and to take the high road even when others don’t.

#### **Background – Personal & Professional:**

- Cheryl’s pre-college life is highlighted above. Her destiny as a “trailblazer” started very early in life.
- Received her Masters of Architecture from Harvard University in urban design and planning policy specialization. Undergrad from Kansas State University in Environmental Design; also completed an intercession program at Oxford Polytechnic School of Architecture.

- Because of her success and reputation in her profession, she's served on the alumni association board of directors for both institutions.
- A few highlights / selected accomplishments in her stellar 35+ year career: Senior Program Manager of design and construction for all 33 sports venues of the 1996 Olympic Games in ATL; McAfee<sup>3</sup> was a Joint Venture partner for the master planning and design team for the 13-year, \$7B expansion of the Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport including the Maynard Jackson International Terminal; Cheryl served as the principal architect for the Joint Venture team; Cheryl was also the architect of the beautiful and LEED-certified Gladys Dennard Library in South Fulton.
- Making history & top honors: First African-American in Kansas history to receive a license in architecture; Her family is the only family in which a father and his two daughters have been elevated to the College of Fellows of the American Institute of Architects (AIA); She served as the first African-American to Chair a National AIA Convention in 2018; Led the way for AIA to develop a leadership pipeline for ethnically diverse women to serve in key governance positions; AND in 2018 Cheryl was honored to receive the Ivan Allen Sr. Trophy, the most prestigious award bestowed by AIA ATLANTA. THIS AWARD BEGAN IN THE 1960's AND HAS BEEN AWARDED TO ONLY THE TOP ARCHITECTS LIKE JOHN PORTMAN, CECIL ALEXANDER, ETC. CHERYL MCAFEE IS ONLY THE 3<sup>RD</sup> WOMAN TO BE HONORED AND THE FIRST AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMAN.

### **Key Comments & Takeaways from Attendees:**

- "An amazing story of working through discrimination. So inspirational. She overcame obstacles and persevered."
- "She never accepted less than the vision implanted within."
- "Never let anyone tell you what you're worth or what you can't do. You can overcome obstacles!"
- "Sometimes it's good just to listen and stay on the high road despite other circumstances."
- "Don't make excuses, make a change."
- "Become / be (like) a butterfly breaking out of the cocoon; open your wings and fly."
- "Don't give up. Be an ethical and honest leader."
- "We all have the answers within us; we just don't trust ourselves. Prove your value in the right way."
- "Stand up for yourself. We know when something's not right."
- "Don't excel for / because of someone else; do it for yourself."
- "Stay focused on what's important and don't get derailed by non-important matters."
- "Be true to yourself, never settle, keep moving on the high road. Keep fighting but with grace."