

Reflections from the Past: Doing the Right Thing — Remembering the Presidency 1987-88

Dr. Barbara Maidment (Eichner) (AK)

For many years following the forced dissolution of the National Association of Negro Home Demonstration Agents (NANHDA) and its amalgamation with the National Home Demonstration Agents Association (NHDA) in 1965, the minority members of what later became known as the National Association of Extension Home Economists (NAEHE) were full members but not officers, except in rare instances. Professional African-American women who had climbed a ladder of success in NANHDA were suddenly "only members", a typical situation, but unbecoming to a professional development organization such as NAEHE.

In 1987, as President-elect, I became more fully aware of this situation. I had been making friends amongst all our members, had travelled with members on other tours, and had been working with members of all backgrounds through committee meetings, Board meetings, Annual Sessions, and similar. It became apparent to me that whenever important decisions were being made, the room was "colorless". I wondered why, but more importantly I knew this wasn't good enough.

At the 1987 Annual Session in Louisville, Kentucky, I asked permission to sit in on the meeting of the Minority Development Network, a group that had come together under their own steam to represent the interests of professional women of color and to voice the concerns and opinions of black minorities to NAEHE. During the meeting, the agents were discussing a mailing they wished to do and the fact that if everyone chipped in \$5 or so, they would be able to do the mailing. I was stunned. I wondered why a committee of NAEHE needed to take up a collection in order to do a simple mailing? It was at that moment I realized the Minority Development Network existed outside of the Association framework and was not fully recognized. This was definitely not good enough. I asked permission to speak and announced that under my presidency, there would be no collections taken up to do simple mailings. I recall a round of applause.

Following this meeting, I knew the Minority Development Network needed to be a fully recognized NAEHE Program of Work committee. Ms. Darsene Baggett, New Jersey, was Chair of the Network and I invited her to join the Board in San Francisco at the Annual Mid-year Meeting. At that meeting I announced that the Minority Development Network would be joining us, would be part of the decision-making, and would be recognized as a full NAEHE Program of Work committee. No one questioned my decision. Later, Darsene and I celebrated that change.

In 1988, during the 54th Annual Session in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania the Minority Development Network was voted the sixth program of work committee of NAEHE. The committee was renamed, Minority Network (MNC).

This significant change helped pave the way for the first black NAEHE President, Mary Wells, in 1990-91. This change also fostered a greater inclusion of all members in the work of the Association and a change in thinking for the way NAEHE approached its important professional development and leadership role.

The Minority Network officially recognized and thanked me for this decision at my Presidential Annual Session in Pittsburgh. While highly appreciated, the recognition was unexpected, because changing the culture of NAEHE was the right thing to do.