‘Step IT Up’ trains women for STEM careers

Ayana Jones
Tribune Staff Writer

An initiative to train minority women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) careers has been launched in Philadelphia.

UST Global, a Los Angeles-based information technology solutions and services company, has brought its Step IT Up America initiative to the city. The program seeks to train and find jobs for 1,000 minority women in 10 of the nation’s largest cities. The long-term goal is to create 5,000 new technology careers for minority women.

“Our goal with this program is to not only change the lives of these women but future generations as well,” said CEO of UST Global Sajan Pillai.

“Right now, women make up just one fourth of the STEM workforce and our goal is to help increase that number. This program will profoundly affect these women and the communities they come from by offering the girls an opportunity to find successful careers.”

Politicians, academic and business leaders turned out for the launch event held Jan. 21 at the University of Pennsylvania Wharton School of Business.

Various speakers were on hand for the launch including Mike Gibbons, deputy dean, Wharton School; Carlos Gutierrez, vice chair of Albright Stonebridge Group and former U.S. Secretary of Commerce; Willie L. Brown Jr., former mayor of San Francisco; Deidre Woods, executive director University of Pennsylvania’s Open Learning Initiative; Jamira Burley, executive director Philadelphia Youth Commission; Eleanor Jean Hendley, television news journalist and founder of Teen Shop and the Rev. Lorina Marshall Blake, president of Independence Blue Cross Foundation. Mayor Michael Nutter sent a video message welcoming Step IT Up to Philadelphia.

During the launch, Economist Bernard E. Anderson highlighted how the initiative will address income disparities in America.

“I am really thrilled that this program is being brought to the city of Philadelphia because it will address one of the searing problems this city faces and indeed that we face in this country and that is racial inequity in American economic life. The inequity is reflected in broad disparities in employment, income and wealth,” said Anderson.

Anderson said the rate of unemployment among African Americans has been twice that of general unemployment for the past three decades.

“We don’t have a labor shortage in America. We have a skills shortage in America and this program is laser-like focused on that issue and that is one of the reasons it’s going to be a success,” he said.

Step IT Up is being launched at a time when STEM jobs are the fastest growing category of jobs in the United States. A report by the U.S. Commerce Department indicates that throughout the next decades STEM occupations are projected to grow by 17 percent, compared to a 9.8 percent growth for other occupations.

The Step IT Up initiative targets women who have displayed the commitment to education by attending a community college. Participating students will choose one of three tracks to pursue including quality analysis, business analysis or software development. After the women undergo training, UST Global will help them obtain jobs with partner organizations around the country.

UST Global is partnering with academic institutions in various cities to provide training. UST Global officials are currently in negotiations to partner with local institutions, including the Community College of Philadelphia, Drexel University, Temple University, Pierce College, Wharton School of Business and University of the Sciences. A partnership has been formed with ITT Technical Institute.

Philadelphia is the second city to welcome the Step IT Up program. The initiative was first launched in Atlanta, Ga., with the inaugural class of 33 women beginning their training at Clark Atlanta University last week.

Contact Staff Writer
Ayana Jones
(215) 893-5747
ajones@phillytrib.com
Economist Bernard Anderson, left, and Sajan Pillai, CEO of UST Global listen to speakers during the launch of Step It Up America in Philadelphia.

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