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A business fiesta



Sara Glassman, Star Tribune

The annual Metropolitan Economic Development Association MEDA Gala, "The Fiesta Latina," at the Hilton in Minneapolis. Dan Gasby (far left) and B. Smith (second from right) with MJ and Tim Coats, vice president at General Mills

By Sara Glassman, Star Tribune  
Last update: December 5, 2009 - 8:19 PM

When a *gitano* (fortuneteller), a live alpaca, author/chef **B. Smith** and the lively **Casablanca Orchestra** get together, you know it's going to be a party.

In this case, the bash was a "Fiesta Latina"-themed gala for the Metropolitan Economic Development Association (MEDA) last month at the Hilton in downtown Minneapolis.

Since 1971, the nonprofit has helped entrepreneurs of color succeed.

"We build and strengthen them," said **Yvonne Cheung Ho**, MEDA president and CEO. "Then when they're strong, they make great employers and great role models."

Personality B. Smith, who was in the Twin Cities to promote her book "Southern Style," has a relationship with Golden Valley-based General Mills. She is the face of Betty Crocker corn-bread mix.

**Tony and Shelleye Williamson**, owners of AJASA Technologies Inc., were honored as entrepreneurs of the year. They started their IT consulting and staffing business in 1995 in their basement. By 2008, the company had more than \$45 million in revenue and more than 100 employees and 275 subcontractors.

"When we first incorporated, we had difficulty meeting corporate clients and figuring out how to organize our company. [MEDA] gave us the tools that fueled our growth," Tony said. "It's a huge honor to be recognized in this way."

"Without MEDA, I don't think we'd be at the level we are today."

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