

# GWENDOLYN PACKNETT

University of  
Missouri-St. Louis

**G**wendolyn Packnett, Ph.D., is director of the office of Multi-cultural Relations/Academic Affairs at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. As a longtime executive committee member and chair of the education committee of the Black Leadership Roundtable (BLR), she organized in late 2008 the first BLR Symposium on Public Education. A total of 1,500 people from 25 area schools and communities attended the two-day conference.

**COULD YOU SUMMARIZE YOUR DUTIES?**

Retaining students to degree completion is our charge. We use a strategic, holistic approach that employs mentoring, tutoring and other aspects to build ongoing relationships with students. Our office works with faculty and staff at all levels.

**WHAT ARE SOME OF THE WAYS YOU AND YOUR OFFICE PROMOTE DIVERSITY?**

Diversity is promoted through establishing relationships, through collaboration and partnerships. It is intentional and deliberate. To limit our efforts to programming places a myopic point of view on diversity. If we do this, we often then substitute "race" for "diversity," but it is more than that. It includes race, gender, socioeconomic, cultural and ethnicity issues.

**DO YOU FIND RESISTANCE?**

I think we encounter some resistance to anything that's different from the norm. That's why it's important to educate through interaction and exposure.

**WHAT'S THE IMPACT OF BLR?**

We are taking the information provided by



the statistics and sharing with the people who are invested in education. We've asked the school districts to share their plans for improving academic achievement, for improving diversity, and to engage in an ongoing dialogue among the 25 school districts that participated. We are attempting to expand the thinking from "I can do it," to "together we can do it."

- Gil Stuenkel



# MARIA DEL CARMEN JACOB

NextGen Information  
Services Inc.

pany, which generates more than \$34 million in annual revenue and has offices in 12 cities in the U.S. and India.

**WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT SKILL AN ENTREPRENEUR CAN POSSESS?**

Resilience. There are going to be many times, especially early on, that will make you question why you started a business. You need to keep pushing yourself and the others around you to be successful. If you do not lead by example, you will ultimately fail.

**WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE SOMEONE STARTING A COMPANY?**

Make sure you have the financial backing to survive the first three to five years. Ask yourself if your product is unique and what

customers need. The most important advice I can give is to listen to your customers.

**YOU ARE ACTIVE WITH ORGANIZATIONS THAT HELP CHILDREN. WHAT DREW YOU TO THEM?**

I am a mother and have natural affection for children. Since I am from Guatemala, I help the lives of the disadvantaged become better and more productive.

**WHAT INSPIRES YOU?**

I am inspired by the opportunity to help and see someone succeed, whether it's in the business world or the kid next door. The bottom line seems to take care of itself when your focus is to help others become what they desire.

- Annemarie Schumacher

# STEVEN HARRIS

RubinBrown

**AS PRESIDENT OF THE ST. LOUIS CHAPTER OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF BLACK ACCOUNTANTS, DO YOU FIND MINORITY GROUPS ARE UNDER-REPRESENTED?**

There's a lot of opportunities to enhance the profession to appeal to more minorities. If you look at recruiting, the number



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