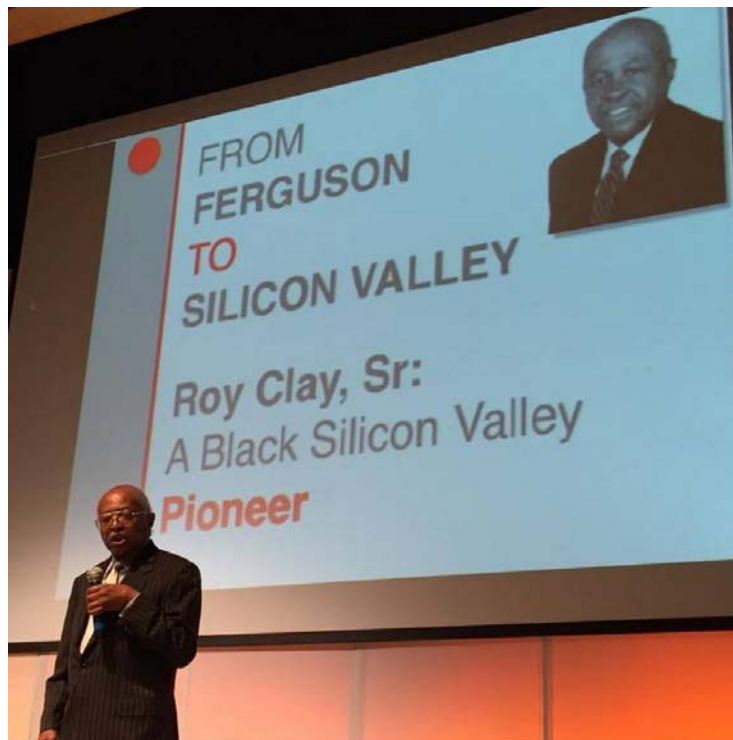


The Miami Herald logo is displayed in a white, gothic-style font on a blue rectangular background.

Black Tech Week spotlights pioneers, rising stars

BY NANCY DAHLBERG - NDAHLBERG@MIAMIHERALD.COM

02/27/2015 5:00 PM | Updated: 02/28/2015 9:55 PM



Silicon Valley pioneer Roy Clay Sr. received a lifetime achievement award at Black Tech Week. NANCY DAHLBERG / MIAMI HERALD

Roy Clay Sr.'s (<http://blacktechweek.com/speaker/roy-clay-sr/>) mother told him “you will face racism the rest of your life, but don’t ever let that be a reason why you don’t succeed.” With a degree in mathematics, he landed his first tech industry job at IBM in 1956 — after five years of being told “we have no jobs for professional Negroes.”

Among many game-changing career highlights, Clay developed Hewlett-Packard's first computer in the 1960s. In the '70s he was instrumental in nurturing Tandem Computers, Compaq and Intel. Clay, who grew up in Ferguson, Missouri, then turned to mentorship, founding scholarship and education programs, and even serving on the city council of Palo Alto, California, a city that was 1 percent black at the time.

At Miami's inaugural Black Tech Week (<http://www.blacktechweek.com/>) at Miami Dade College's North Campus on Friday, Clay was honored with a lifetime achievement award. In accepting the award, he told the audience of students and young technology entrepreneurs his mission continues and he will help however he can. Backstage, he said he wanted to stay involved in Miami's efforts to promote a diverse ecosystem.

To close out Black History Month, Clay and some of today's tech innovators kept Black Tech Week firmly focused on the future. Founded by Felecia Hatcher (<http://miamiherald.typepad.com/the-starting-gate/2013/11/qa-with-felecia-hatcher-a-passion-for-sweets-and-tech.html>) and Derick Pearson of Code Fever, a nonprofit that teaches coding and entrepreneurship to kids in low-income communities, the inaugural event — planned and executed in under a month, (<http://www.miamiherald.com/news/business/article9686270.html>) startup speed — aimed to help create a stronger entrepreneurial ecosystem for people of color and was open to the public.

Throughout the week, African American entrepreneurs and technologists hosted "Hours of Code" in South Florida schools, sharing with K-12 students ways to be creators of technology, not just consumers. College students participated in mentor meetups and young entrepreneurs took to the stage to pitch their businesses before panels of judges, all investors or serial entrepreneurs, and two winners took home \$1,000 cash prizes.

But the highlight of the week was the summit on Thursday and Friday, where dozens of luminaries from around the world shared stories and advice on topics as diverse as the skills gap, opportunities in Africa, Cuba and Jamaica, design thinking, fund-raising, manufacturing, healthcare and education. It included innovators and top technologists at companies such as Google, SnapChat and Coca-Cola as well as a number of venture capitalists. The summit was heavy on advice, which continued in the hallways and lunch tables.

“Entrepreneurship is a contact sport. You are going to have to engage the world. ... It’s the soft skills that will inform your success – it’s the ability to connect with people almost at an emotional level. Think of your work in terms of how it improves people’s lives,” said John Lewis, global chief diversity officer of the Coca-Cola Co. “The world needs you. The world needs bright, multicultural, dynamic leaders to chart this new way.”

Also contributing to the two-day conversation: Chinedu Echeruo, who sold his company HopStop to Apple for \$1 billion; Delane Parnell, at 22 one of the nation’s youngest venture capitalists; and Jon Gosier of Appfrica and MetaLayer. South Florida entrepreneurs and investors who spoke at the conference included Brian Brackeen

(<http://www.miamiherald.com/news/business/article4413873.html>) of Kairos, Pandwe Gibson (<http://miamiherald.typepad.com/the-starting-gate/2014/08/its-great-that-technology-entrepreneurs-in-south-florida-are-helped-by-many-organizations-and-several-incubators-but-as-p.html>) of EcoTech Visions, Stonly Baptiste of Urban.us

(<http://www.miamiherald.com/news/business/biz-monday/article3525973.html>) and Faquiry Diaz Cala of Tres Mares Group, among others.

Although the event focused on celebrating tech innovators of color, it was prompted by the current state of diversity (<http://miamiherald.typepad.com/the-starting-gate/2014/07/goal-a-diverse-and-inclusive-entrepreneurial-community.html>). Most of the marquee Silicon Valley companies – Facebook, Twitter, Google – have workforces with under 5 percent black technologists.

“Google’s mission is to be universally accessible and useful, but here’s the reality internally: what we have all heard, 2 percent black, 3 percent Hispanic. But here is another reality: \$111 billion in economic activity changes hands on Google in 2013. Are you getting a piece of that pie?” asked Jewel Burks of Accelerate with Google.

Google has a couple of programs to help you do that, Burks said. Accelerate with Google Academy is a free 12-week bootcamp for helping business owners get people to your website. A new program for businesses that make something that Google could use, the Google Small Business Supplier Diversity Program, promises payment within 15 days among other benefits, she said.

As to the numbers in the workforce, she said, “There are great people working on that problem and it will be solved.”

As part of a spirited panel discussion on diversity and inclusion lead by Miami's Michael Hall of Digital Grass, Burks, who is also CEO of a startup, PartPic, said she's been told if she were a white male she would have raised \$10 million by now. Mary Spio (<http://www.miamiherald.com/news/business/article7871202.html>), founder of Next Galaxy in Miami Beach who started her career as a rocket scientist at Boeing, said she was voted out of one of her earlier companies because an investor thought it needed to be led by a white male instead of her.

Still, all the panelists said the black community can also do more to support their own community, and it wasn't lost on this panel that the event Thursday was sparsely attended (Friday's summit drew a fuller house). "We have to support each other, we have to invest in our communities," Spio said.

And mentorship is really key — we didn't get here by ourselves and now we need to lift others, said Aurelia Crews, a director of Rokk3r Labs, which helps cobuild young companies (<http://miamiherald.typepad.com/the-starting-gate/2014/10/rokk3r-announces-details-on-cobuilding-methodology.html>).

Black Tech Week, with about 10 events, was organized by a steering committee of a half-dozen people representing organizations promoting entrepreneurship, STEM education and diversity. The inaugural event received \$100,000 in Knight Foundation funding as well as other sponsorships.

The conference continues Saturday with a hackathon, women's brunch and series of workshops. Videos from the conference as well as behind-the-scenes conversations will be available on blacktechweek.com (<http://blacktechweek.com/>) within a few weeks, Hatcher said.

"We are absolutely doing this again next year," Hatcher said on Friday. "We've been asked to bring this to other cities already, but we are committed to always keeping this in Miami. Our overall goal with Black Tech Week will become similar to Global Entrepreneurship Week, where partners, organizations, educational institutions and individuals will host Black Tech Week events all over the globe under our four pillars — creativity, culture, technology and innovation — during the last week of Black History Month."

Hatcher said she heard from many people about how accessible the speakers and venture capitalists have been to answer questions. “They also told me ‘I was comfortable and confident in my own skin all week.’ ”

Follow Nancy Dahlberg on Twitter @ndahlberg.