

Sonoco trade show targets businesses owned by minorities, women

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Diversity means business.

That's the message from Sonoco's recent Supplier Diversity Trade Show held at Coker College.

Now in its third year, the trade show is an event that brings together Sonoco customers with minority-owned and women-owned supplier businesses and provides them with opportunities to see what each other has to offer.

"Sonoco does this because

it's good business," said Marc Ensign, who leads the Sonoco team that organizes the trade show.

Sonoco partners with JBE Inc., a minority-owned manufacturing company in Hartsville, to put on the trade show each year, according to Ensign.

"Supplier diversity provides economic opportunities to historically disadvantaged businesses," Ensign said.

Encouraging supplier diversity is a trend in business, Ensign said. "In the old days, companies did it out of a social

conscience, it was the right thing to do," he said. "Today, it drives business. Business is about making money."

About 200 people representing some 40 different corporations and 30 to 40 minority-owned and women-owned businesses participated in this year's trade show, according to Ensign. "This is our third year, and each year it's grown," he said.

The event includes presentations about what participating businesses have to offer, as well as one-on-one networking

opportunities, Ensign said.

"We've had very favorable comments from participants," Ensign said.

Ensign said it is rare for a participating business to come away with a new business deal in hand. "Growing a business takes time," he said. "This allows businesses to build relationships that may lead to additional business two months, three months or so down the road."

The show is one of a series held across the state, Ensign said, and is usually one of the largest in the state.