



Hampton Roads Black Media Professionals, Inc. (HRBMP) was founded in 1982 as Tidewater Media Professionals (TMP). James Wright, widely recognized as the organization's founding father, was concerned by the continuous negative portrayal of Blacks in the media with little reported on the positive contributions of the Black community. What started out as conversations with a few peers including, Barbara Ciara, Marvin Leon Lake, Lou Paris, Don Roberts and Regina Willey quickly grew into a membership of 25 media professionals working in newspaper, television, radio, academia and public relations.

TMP's goals were as follows: to leverage members' professional standing to influence how Blacks were portrayed in the media; to ensure Blacks were not disproportionately reflected when it came to crime; to mobilize efforts to incorporate more diverse perspectives in assignment/coverage selection; to ensure Black voices were included in meaningful conversations impacting the news and to open doors for others to follow.

TMP also served as a support group for its members, a network for future employment opportunities and advisers to those who aspired to media careers. The mindset of TMP members was, "The people who report the news want to reach out to those who are the news to make the news more reflective of our communities."

In support of its outreach to the community, members would often say, "You don't have to commit a crime to make the news. To make the news or to get coverage for an event, you must know what mechanisms to use, and how and when to use them to get the most effective results." TMP adopted the motto, "Get to know us...learn to use us."

Don Roberts was the first president. His view of the early days was that the organization had to proceed in the right direction with the right intent to establish TMP for the long haul – as Don said, "This was never intended to be a short-term mission."

In 1988, under the presidency of Arthur Fennell, TMP became HRBMP. This move was intended to take TMP to the next level by making it an official affiliate chapter of the National Association of Black Journalists, Inc. Within two years, HRBMP -- "The little chapter that could," was awarded NABJ Chapter of the Year. In 2005, under the presidency of Kafi Rouse, HRBMP was again honored as NABJ Chapter of the Year.



HRBMP HISTORY CONTINUES:

To date, three of HRBMP's presidents have served as NABJ presidents – Arthur Fennell, Barbara Ciara and Herb Lowe. Over the years, HRBMP has had 20 presidents and up to 100 members who have worked to execute programs in line with its mission. Some of these programs include working with universities and other nonprofit organizations on journalism workshops, media training, and support for young African-Americans with groups like the Hampton Roads Committee of 200+ Men, Norfolk State University, Hampton University, Elizabeth City State University, the Urban League of Hampton Roads, and others.

With outstanding support from sponsors, patrons and the community, more than \$130,000 has been awarded in scholarships. The majority of these scholarship funds were raised during HRBMP's former signature program, Echoes of Excellence, which later became The Excel Awards. Additional scholarship funds have been secured through the diligence and leadership of immediate past president, Cheryl Ross.

HRBMP continues to serve as a liaison between the community and the media. Its members work to: provide scholarships to eligible minority college students majoring in media-related fields; serve as role models and mentors to students interested in media careers, support the career development of media professionals and promote and produce programs to support the organization's people, priorities and programs.

Now under the presidency of HRBMP founding member and former president Karen Eure Wilson, HRBMP approaches non-traditional ways to increase active membership and operates in a manner that makes it easier for members to participate. Geographical boundaries have eroded with the advancement of technology. Creation of an "Alumni/Affiliate Membership" has allowed the organization to expand as professionals living outside of Hampton Roads have joined the ranks. More members have become involved as HRBMP moved to a program-driven operating process and replaced monthly meetings with conference calls, video conferencing and social media. "Taking the meetings to the members instead of the members to the meetings has had a significant impact as we work together to shoulder the load."

Members recognize that the survival and advancement of its organization is dependent upon younger professionals and students understanding the significance and critical need for organizations such as HRBMP and NABJ to continue. It will also thrive with continued support from its faithful community and business partners.

Out of respect and gratitude for the journalists who founded TMP, Karen leads the organization as it continues to facilitate established programs and create new ventures. "Great strides have been made, but there is still more to do. Our story and struggle matter and as people entrusted with the talent to communicate, we must continue to keep our presence and contributions current and relevant."

The "little chapter that could" will continue to play a big part in the advancement, support and celebration of racial diversity in the career field and in the community. "Get to know us ... learn to use us."