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HISTORY OF THE MULTICULTURAL FOODSERVICE & HOSPITALITY ALLIANCE (MFHA)

While browsing through an industry journal, [Gerry Fernandez](#), founder of The Multicultural Foodservice & Hospitality Alliance (MFHA), spotted an advertisement for the annual Women's Foodservice Forum (WFF), a group focused on creating opportunities for women in the foodservice industry. Gerry thought that if there was a group focused on creating career opportunities for women, then there must be a need for a group that focuses on creating career opportunities for minorities and people of color.

At the time, Gerry was employed at General Mills, Inc. Using his vast network of industry connections, in September 1996, Gerry assembled a group of 17 professionals from different segments of the industry to discuss the concept of creating an organization that promoted opportunities for minorities and people of color in the food and hospitality industry.

The group met again in November. At this meeting, Gerry's [vision](#) was branded with the name The Multicultural Foodservice & Hospitality Alliance (MFHA).

With the first version of MFHA's logo designed by Penton Publishing Group, a group of dedicated food and hospitality companies, and Gerry elected as the organization's president, the MFHA brand was born. In April 1997, MFHA filed its Articles of Incorporation and selected its first [Board of Directors](#). Gerry became executive on loan to MFHA from General Mills.

In May 1997, MFHA successfully impressed attendees at the National Restaurant's Association's (NRA) annual convention with its first [Diversity Leadership Reception](#) at the former Michael Jordan's Restaurant in Chicago. With more than 350 attendees, this marked the largest gathering of multicultural industry professionals committed to diversity and inclusion at the time.

In 1998, MFHA held its first [National Conference](#) in Atlanta with the theme "Business Solutions through Multicultural Diversity." Two years later, MFHA introduced the first Showcase of the Stars™ event.

[Showcase of the Stars™](#) is a live, interactive career exploration event that promotes careers in the food and hospitality industry to high school and college student. The purpose of the event is to educate, motivate, and inspire young people, particularly from multicultural and urban communities, to pursue careers in the restaurant, foodservice, lodging, and manufacturing industries. Showcase of the Stars™ features diverse professional panelists, or "stars," that represent different segments of the industry. Panelists engage young audience members with their own inspirational success stories and follow-up with a question and answer session.

Since its first Showcase of the Stars™ in Chicago, MFHA has delivered the award-winning event to more than 26 cities across the country. Showcase, which was originally presented to high school students, has been extended to include colleges and universities that serve multicultural and minority student populations. MFHA has held over 70 events and reached over 472 schools since its inception.

The online version of Showcase of the Stars™, www.whatsnext4me.com (WN4ME), was developed in 2004. It is a career exploration website targeted to high school students that promotes opportunities in the food and hospitality industry. It features hundreds of professional profiles as well a vast collection of helpful resources for students, parents, and educators.

MFHA's approach to diversity and inclusion has consistently included business solutions, business opportunities, and business development. To support its diversity and inclusion efforts, MFHA introduced numerous products catered to multiculturalism and the food and hospitality industry including [Diverse Career Annual & Resource Guide](#), [Diverse Executive Development Guide](#), [QuickVue Translation Guides](#), and [Multicultural Marketing Guides](#).

As diversity and inclusion reached its full maturity, MFHA revised its strategic plan by shifting focus to attract multicultural talent to the food and hospitality industry, form a [Multicultural Resource Bank](#) to develop that talent, and educate members and the industry on building their cultural intelligence. The new strategic plan was launched at the MFHA Talent Summit 2008 held in Chicago.

In 2009, MFHA initiated a Regional Council Strategy to reach a wider audience. The councils are held to identify regional issues related to multiculturalism in the workplace. In addition to professional development workshops and networking events, MFHA releases the [Report to the Community](#) and distributes the publication to community-based organizations throughout the country.

Looking ahead, MFHA's focus will be on building [Cultural Intelligence](#), cultural competency, and cultural fluency among management so they can deliver better business results. In this increasingly multicultural world, we must develop Cultural Intelligence in our businesses and within our leadership in order to survive and succeed.

In March 2011, MFHA, partnering with Johnson & Wales University, launched its [first Cultural Intelligence Initiative](#). This Cultural Intelligence focus will move MFHA and the industry beyond just awareness to skills and competency building. MFHA offers workshops, seminars, and products geared toward top-level executives to mid-level managers who share a desire to build their knowledge and cultural perspectives. The workshops, presented nationwide, include such topics as Latino Identity, Break Black/African-American Perspectives, Asian Insights, and [LGBT Employees & Guests](#).

In order to further educate, inspire, and engage the food and hospitality industry's future workforce, MFHA launched its first issue of INclusion INmotion, a free online "multicultural handbook" for students interested in a food and hospitality career. The publication is available for students, parents, and educators at www.inclusioninmotion.com and will be published tri-annually.

Since its first conference over 15 years ago, MFHA has continued to deliver high quality events, workshops, and products focused on professional development, cultural intelligence building, and networking. MFHA continues to educate, advocate for, and connect its members to help them effectively engage multicultural employees, customers, and communities.

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