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PR rebound
Longtime radio personality bounces back with own firm

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OKEMOS - Getting fired after 16 years at a local radio station may have been a bit of good fortune for Brant Johnson.

That's because the one-time voice at WQHH-FM has been able to launch a public relations and media consulting firm that had been on his mind for some time.

Johnson believes the 16 years he spent floating around the broadcast media industry has given him the wealth of experience and knowledge to set him apart from competitors as he builds Brant A. Johnson, J.D. & Associates.

During his time as vice president of the Black Programmers Coalition, his connections expanded outside the Lansing area to include contacts across the Midwest. Johnson intends to use those connections to help communities communicate more effectively.

"People don't have huge budgets," Johnson said. "So, whatever medium they choose in 2009 has to be properly selected."

Johnson has the ball rolling with clients. He has done consulting for "The College Road Trip: How to Prepare, Choose, Apply, and Pay for College," a cooperative event between Michigan State University and the Black Child and Family Institute of Lansing. He's also doing public relations consulting with C.L. Moore & Associates, an accounting firm, and Lansing restaurant and bar 621.

Finishing up school

In 1987, Johnson returned home to Detroit from MSU just a few credits shy of a telecommunications degree. He returned to the Lansing area in 1990 to finish his final credits and pursue a career in radio.

Johnson started in Lansing radio in 1991 at WQHH-FM spinning automated tape reels. Through the years, he filled a variety of roles in television and radio, from host, to production manager, camera crew to program director - a role he held for 13 years.

"Being able to inform people about issues that were important to them was probably my favorite part of the job," Johnson said, "but it doesn't really pay much. You've got to really love it to want to do it."

WQHH was Lansing's first black-owned local FM station. It was sold in 2006 to MacDonald Broadcasting Co. in Saginaw.

Johnson won the 1998 Cullen DuBose Award for small market program director of the year. He also was one of The Citizen's Press Top Ten Lansing's Most Distinguished Persons.
Meanwhile, he was considering something more.

"I had thought about doing public relations for a couple of years, but the idea of taking on a business as a full-time responsibility was something I was kind of afraid of," Johnson said.

He weighed the benefits of a steady paycheck against the risks of a personal enterprise, and decided it wasn't time to gamble.

"If you don't work, you don't get paid," Johnson said.

change of direction

Johnson said conflicting professional viewpoints with management led to his departure last year. Once again, he started thinking about starting a business.

"I spent the entire summer trying to decide what I was going to do next with my life," Johnson said. "I built relationships; I built a pretty good network ... I had a couple of mentors frame my thinking. I wasn't afraid of failing, I was afraid of not being able to feed myself."

Johnson believes there are organizations in the Lansing area that could use some help in more effectively reaching out to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, black, Latino and poor communities in the area. He said minority communities have been largely passed over in the communications world.

"People need to see that there are great, talented people, heroes like Barack Obama living right around the corner," Johnson said. "Access is priceless and I'm in the business of access."

"Brant has always been involved with his community," said Tony Baltimore, assistant to U.S. Rep. Mike Rogers, R-Howell, and Johnson's friend of 15 years. "He's always been an advocate and a voice for equal opportunities. He's someone who always reaches across the aisle."

When Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast in 2005, Johnson was one of the first in line to help, aiding a local relief effort. His philanthropy stems from one idea: "Success is contingent upon the success of others," said Johnson.

According to a friend and associate, the Rev. Michael Murphy of St. Stevens Community Church in Lansing, Johnson worked with Lansing Community College and others in the community to raise more than $1.5 million in goods and services for the victims of Katrina.

"Brant's leadership in the media community, his help with radio, and his everyday involvement were invaluable to that goal," Murphy said.

Feeling fortunate

Johnson isn't done yet, though. His latest project is a topical discussion show on public access television.

The tapings are in progress, and one of the first installments of that series - "Can I Get a Bailout?" - will feature a former bank regulator and an area public accountant to comment on the actions of Washington to stimulate the ailing economy.

With opportunities lined up, Johnson can't help but feel lucky.

"I believe God has a plan for me, and this is part of his plan. He's blessed me with these talents and
these friends,” he said. "I've just been blessed."