

2012 Minority Business Leader Awards

This year's class of 25 honorees was chosen by our panel of judges from a pool of more than 100 applicants. They come from a diverse cross section of industries and locations, and their stories contain invaluable lessons for anyone who is running a business or dreams of starting one. Accessing capital. Finding talented people. Penetrating new markets. Thinking and acting strategically. These are challenging times to increase sales, boost profits and stay a step ahead of the competition. This year's honorees show that it can be done — it's why they can't wait to get to work in the morning, roll up their sleeves and make a difference for the minority business leaders who will emerge in their wake. Besides making their mark in the Washington-area business community, this year's winners also want to leave a legacy for their industries, the people they employ, their families and friends. Their stories are inspiring to read — and see and hear. Go to www.wbminoritybusinessleaders.com and watch their video interviews.

Anthony Pierce

Partner, Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP

Anthony "Tony" Pierce, 50, is a native Washingtonian and has never worked for any law firm other than Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP. After starting as a summer associate in 1986, he ascended to office managing partner in 2008. In 2011, he was honored for winning one of Virginia Lawyers Weekly's "25 Top Verdicts" from the past 25 years. He helped found The Potomac Coalition, an African-American organization that advocates for national urban economic issues. Pierce is married and has three daughters. He earned a bachelor's in public administration from George Mason University and a law degree from Georgetown University.

What's keeping you awake at night? A lot of things keep me awake at night. I would say probably, the No. 1 issue is we've had a good run of growth and profitability, and I want to make sure we keep it up.

What makes you excited to come to work in the morning? My practice. I have to manage some of my time, and then I have my practice, the real legal work I'm doing.

I don't think a day has gone by when I did not have an interesting legal issue to tackle or I was trying to help a client on a complex business issue. That keeps you coming back.

Worst business advice you ever got in your career? Tony, give up.

What fictional character do you most identify with? Easy Rawlins. He's a hardworking guy, up from his bootstraps. He's a character in the 1950s, when a lot of African-Americans left Texas to move to Los Angeles to get away from the racism in the South. I don't want to say he's a fix-it man — he has regular jobs — but people ask him to take care of a problem, and he never does it in an illegal way, but he ends up solving it. He's ethical. He's street-smart.

Tell us something most people still don't know about you. I'm a big gamer. I love video games. For a 50-year-old man, that's a strange thing, I know. But there are other 50-year-olds I play with online.

