



The National Black Footwear Forum Returns this Fall

The Footwear Distributors and Retailers of America (FDRA) and Pensole Lewis College of Business & Design, co-founders of the Black Footwear Forum (BFF), are excited to announce the return of the National Black Footwear Forum taking place September 15–17, 2023. This event will once again welcome the black footwear community to the Pensole Lewis College campus in Detroit, MI. New this year, the event will also kick-off with a DEI Summit, held on September 14, 2023, that will bring together CEOs and executives across the industry to focus on increasing diversity and equity within the footwear industry.

Additionally, the BFF is excited to announce the upcoming launch of a fresh and innovative podcast, “Blacklights,” which continues conversations on diversity, highlights black footwear industry leaders, and provides resources on how to navigate the footwear industry as POC. The podcast launches March 13, 2023, with hosts Dion Walcott, Director of Partnerships & Engagement, Pensole, and LaShae Boone-McCray, Director of Strategic Accounts, RG Barry.

The BFF continues to be led by an invaluable Advisory Board. The Board recently added two new members, Darius Billings, VP of Marketing & Outreach, The Athlete’s Foot, and April Dinwoodie, DEIB Lead, Steve Madden. The Board continues to direct the BFF in issues of community engagement, education, networking, in-person events, and efforts by regional BFF chapters in key cities nationwide.

“The BFF is on the move as we work to ensure that black employees in the footwear industry are well-served and empowered to make substantial gains in our industry,” offered Pensole Lewis College of Business & Design President Dr. D’Wayne Edwards. He added, “It’s my privilege to welcome the Black Footwear Forum back to Pensole Lewis College in 2023 and continue the good work that was accomplished here in Detroit last September.”

“After the amazing and empowering event in Detroit last year it was a no-brainer to have the BFF return to the Motor City in 2023” said FDRA President and CEO Matt Priest. “Couple the national event with a new podcast, an active Advisory Board, and dynamic and engaging regional chapters, and the future of the BFF and our employees has never been brighter.”

To support the Black Footwear Forum and work alongside this program, please reach out to Sabria Butler at sbutler@fdra.org or Dion Walcott at walcott@pensole.com. Through your partnership with the Black Footwear Forum, you will have the opportunity to be a part of our efforts to empower and support black employees in the footwear industry. Your support will also provide you with valuable benefits such as visibility and exposure at our event and on our podcast, networking opportunities with industry leaders, and access to essential resources and information. We hope you will join us in our mission to increase diversity and equity within the footwear industry. Visit blackfootwearforum.com for more details.

About the Black Footwear Forum: The Black Footwear Forum (BFF) seeks to enhance access, education, and awareness to increase opportunities for Black professionals to influence, lead, and impact the global footwear industry and consumer culture. The Forum is intentional in its efforts to make footwear an increasingly diverse industry, one that not only caters to Black consumers but is also well-represented by Black voices and leadership.

About Pensole Lewis College of Business & Design (PLC): The Pensole Lewis College of Business and Design is the name chosen to be used by the Lewis College of Business, the first and only HBCU in the State of Michigan. The Lewis College of Business was originally founded by Dr. Violet T. Lewis. Dr. D’Wayne Edwards, founder of the Pensole Design Academy in Oregon, is working to reinstate the Lewis College of Business in Detroit. Pensole Lewis College, in collaboration with the College for Creative Studies (CCS), will offer programs across design, sustainability, business, STEM, and more, serving young Black creatives across industries. The Pensole Lewis College of Business and Design Founding partners are Target and the Gilbert Family Foundation. Find more at pensolelewiscollege.com.

About FDRA: FDRA is governed and directed by footwear executives and is the only trade organization focused solely on the footwear industry. Serving the full footwear supply chain, it boosts the bottom lines of its members through innovative products, training and consulting on footwear design and development, sourcing and compliance, trade and customs, advocacy, and consumer and sales trend analysis for shoe retailers around the world. FDRA supports 500 companies and brands worldwide, representing 95% of total U.S. footwear sales.