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## Tucker seeks \$90 million to help minority firms

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Calling Stanley W. Tucker an angel may be going overboard, but for many local minority entrepreneurs, he could become quite the godsend.

"Many of them want to expand, but they just do not have the money," said Joe Aston, assistant chief of the Baltimore Minority Business Initiative Program, a small business development program run by Baltimore City officials. "They are stuck, and it sounds like Tucker would be in a position to liberate them."

That's because Tucker is trying to raise \$90 million for a venture capital fund targeting small businesses owned by minorities, women and other socially or economically disadvantaged groups in the Mid-Atlantic region.

He's a principal of the Maryland Small Business Development Financing Authority Management Group LP, a private concern that evolved out of a state government economic development program Tucker helped grow and nurture. The group runs MMG Ventures LP, the venture capital fund.

Along with three other principals, Tucker started the fund in December 1996, seeking private investors, such as banks and other financial institutions.

"Currently, we are sitting on \$10 million," Tucker said. "I believe that we will reach our \$90 million goal."

Having 90 percent of the goal still to go might seem a little daunting, but as soon as Tucker and his team raise an additional \$20 million, the federal government will invest another \$60 million.

Meanwhile, the Maryland Small Business Development Financing Authority is still lending money to local entrepreneurs, averaging 35 loans a year that range from \$50,000 to \$1 million. Tucker's group was successful earlier this year in helping to get federal and state legislation passed that allows the use of public money to pump into a private venture capital fund.

"We actually set a national precedent," Tucker said.

Like other venture capital funds, Tucker's group would take an equity position in companies in which they invest.

"Over the years, I have learned to work with people," Tucker said. "One of the reasons why we will be successful is because we believe in developing partnerships with people that are meaningful."

Tucker's commitment to teamwork was apparent back when he played point guard on the Morgan State University basketball team.

"I always liked the idea of getting the ball up court and seeing that our team took the lead," said Tucker, who went on to receive a master's degree in management and public policy from Carnegie Mellon University.

Even though Tucker was one of the team's starters, he wasn't focused only on his own accomplishments. "Playing basketball taught me that a team had to work together. The goal was to score, and if someone scored everyone benefited."

He held the same philosophy at the Maryland Small Business Development Financing Authority, which he joined as executive director in 1982. Under his direction, the agency developed a loan fund used to guarantee as much as 80 percent of long-term loans banks make to minority businesses.

Now, he's trying to provide management and technical assistance, in addition to capital. The seven-person staff at the financing authority helps minority entrepreneurs with business plans, growth and development strategies and other concerns that are crucial to running successful enterprises.

The success of Tucker's quest is crucial to the survival of minority-owned businesses in the region, said Marvin Masterson, a lawyer who heads the state office of minority affairs.

"There have been a myriad of businesses in our state who have been successful because of the direct involvement of Stanley Tucker and the people who work with him," Masterson said. "It is vitally important that he succeed."

Tucker, 48, spends a lot of his time these days meeting with potential investors. With more than 16 years of experience in lending and venture capital investing, he's confident he will be able to meet the challenge.

"Many of the businesses that we invest in will create jobs, and they will actually help transform this country economically," said Tucker, a native of South Carolina, whose parents, Ivory and Eugene, were business owners there.

"I have seen it happen in Maryland, and I know what can happen in the rest of the region when people are given an opportunity."

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