

BUSINESS

Veteran Computer Consultants staff is 'soldiering on'

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UPPER MERION — Minorities and women are vigorously reaping their share of the government contracts to which they are entitled.

Disabled veterans? Not so much.

At a time of life when he could be taking things a little easier, Richard Ladson, who served as IT sage at Unisys for 40 years, is aggressively out to change all that with his new company, Veteran Computer Consultants, a Service Disabled Veteran Owned Business (SDVOB) that specializes in IT consulting, training, computer setup and repair.

With the help of four like-minded venturers — Peter Brander, Tom Tyree, David Freeburn, Bill Gutches and Sharon Torello — he found through Technology Professionals Networking Group Ladson's put himself in the thick of a battle where beefy government contracts rightfully go to the top dogs.

“Women and minorities and hub zones are receiving over 100 percent of their target, and disabled veterans are getting only 33 percent,” said Ladson, a disabled veteran of the U.S. Army who served from 1960 to 1962.

“The government agencies are exceeding their goal for giving the contracting work to minorities and women, but when it comes to disabled veterans it’s not even on the charts. There’s a big discrepancy but I don’t know why.”

He mused that the incongruity could stem from the relative young age of the veterans program.

“It’s seven or eight years old, which is new by government standards. I guess it just hasn’t ramped up yet. This is an opportunity to correct that and get some business in this area. The thrust of what we’re doing is to create jobs, for veterans and technologists in this area, and our edge is that I get to the head of the line as a disabled veteran.”

Ladson’s recent meeting with a Federal Aviation Administration was his tip-off that even government agencies aren’t aware of the protocol.

“They’re giving almost no business to veterans, and I asked the guy why is that. He admitted the agencies contracting people just aren’t aware of this program,” Ladson said. “It’s hard to believe that the government is sponsoring this program but agencies in the government aren’t aware they’re supposed to give preference to disabled veterans. If they’re not meeting their goal, the law says they’re supposed to bend over backwards to give it to someone who is qualified.”

Despite the omnipresence of e-mail, Ladson’s fortuitously assembled crackerjack team still enjoys getting together face-to-face once a week to talk strategy over coffee at a King of Prussia cafe.

Tyree, the only other TPNG recruit who is a veteran (U.S. Navy) agreed with Ladson that the company’s mission is to “create jobs, and we’d like to create them for veterans. We believe that there is a great number of veterans coming back from war being trained, and will find it difficult to get a job. Can we help with that?

“There are three things that Veteran Computer Consultants can do,” Tyree added. “One is selling computers - that’s the easy part. Secondly, we can be a sub contractor to some big company that has a government contract and wants to give the 3 percent set-asides and get their credit for that - companies like Lockheed, Unisys. We help them meet that requirement by supplying them with people to do those jobs for the government.

“Third, can we actually become the prime contractor that goes to the government, proposes 100 people, and gets a contract? Yes, we could actually do that with all that we have.”

Ladson admitted he couldn’t be working this niche by himself, and that VCC’s grand aspirations are realistic due to the high-level management team that fell into place around him.

“I have a pool of highly skilled resources and technology support, and we’re all going for the same goal, which is to exploit the SDVOB status that I have - which gives us an edge to benefit ourselves, veterans and other members of this technology society.”

Freeburn nodded, grinning: “Dick is from the school of hard knocks, and as he was trying to set up the business on his own, running into some roadblocks, he decided this could be much more effective with a team of people. Rather than just doing small potatoes as a single-person enterprise, we’re trying to get involved on a larger scale. When you’re selling computers, you’re not creating that many jobs. But when you get in these government contracts, if we have the opportunity to bid on them and bring a lot of those jobs to this region, and if we have the resources, the technology and the expertise ... this gives us a chance to do that.”

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