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SPRING 09



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“
I am very task-oriented and objective-focused and don't like to stop until I achieve what I set out to do; and I don't like to let my employees down.
”

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Determined To Succeed

By Monica M. Harris
SBA Office of Marketing
& Customer Service

Hard work and determination are two critical elements for success when considering your own business. Grace Dittmar, president & CEO of Trusted Mission Solutions, Inc., located in Mclean, Va., has proven that both elements have worked for her. TMS offers information technology and management consulting services with its main focus on security.

Dittmar faced both financial and personnel challenges when starting her business in 2001. Through counseling services, and assistance in preparing a financial infrastructure from SCORE, Grace has succeeded in making her business a success. Much of Dittmar's success is through her determination to succeed. "There are several sources of motivation when I hit 'bumps in the road.' I am very task-oriented and objective-focused and don't like to stop until I achieve what I set out to do; and I don't like to let my employees down," said Dittmar.

TMS ranked number 74 in 2007 by Inc. magazine within the top 100 fastest growing companies for the Washington, D.C./West Virginia metro region. In 2008, Dittmar was named the District of Columbia Small Business Person of the Year. When responding to the importance of winning this award, Dittmar said, "It is a tremendous honor to represent all of the entrepreneurs who have invested their blood, sweat, and tears into creating a business and realizing their hopes and dreams."



"I used SBA's PRONET to perform searches on the number of 8(a) and woman-owned businesses to assess the level of competition."

— Grace Dittmar
Trusted Mission
Solutions, Inc.

Dittmar expressed her appreciation for SBA's effort in promoting small businesses and feels that she has been the fortunate beneficiary of its programs and support. She also feels her company's success is an example of how small businesses can benefit from SBA's programs. "I used SBA's Pro*net to perform searches on the number of 8(a) and woman-owned businesses to assess the level of competition. I also relied on my own personal experience from working within the federal contracting market space over the years," said Dittmar.

Over the years, TMS has benefited from participating in SBA's mentor-protégé program. Through this partnership, TMS has progressed to an established company which has been awarded large contracts that it otherwise would not have been able to pursue on its own.

Since starting the company, Dittmar has developed several mentor relationships and typically relies on these mentors or peers (other executive colleagues) for advice.

In 2002, less than a year after being incorporated, TMS was certified in SBA's 8(a) program. The 8(a) certification opened doors of opportunity

leading TMS to win several competitive contracts, including two contracts with SBA to provide Web development and database services for the Office of the Chief Information Officer. Dittmar started her company with just herself and one part-time person. TMS has grown to a staff of almost 50 and expects to achieve around \$10 million in revenue while building a successful past performance track record and establishing a sound delivery infrastructure.

Dittmar used the SBA's Web site extensively for accessing

information on the 8(a) program and for business start-up information. She also found helpful information on accounting, as well as lists of information sources on government contracting for 8(a) as well as woman-owned businesses. SBA's Web site is also where she found SCORE, Counselors to America's Small Business.

Dittmar's determination to succeed and help others is evident in her dedication to give back to the community. "I feel very blessed to have had the help of mentors and others who have provided me with support and encouragement over

the years. I feel it is important to give back in any way that you can, including giving back to the community" said Dittmar. This is demonstrated in her corporate sponsorship for the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation Walk, supporting the Asian American Justice Center, and serving as one of the small business representatives for the GSA Information Technology Industry-Government Council. This year, TMS is sponsoring a team for Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation Walk to Cure Diabetes in May.

The Spirit of Entrepreneurship

By Joanna Mounce Stancil
SBA Office of Marketing & Customer Service

Those who know her say Karen Barbour embodies the spirit of entrepreneurship and advocacy. Not content to just start and grow her successful Westminster, Md.-based company, she also works to overcome barriers to minority- and women-owned firms obtaining the bonding necessary for small businesses to compete in the marketplace.

In 2002 she established The Barbour Group, LLC as an independent insurance agency focusing on construction bonding and commercial insurance. Karen took a big risk, not only in starting a business, but the first female-owned bonding agency in



"The SBA and SBDC have helped my company overcome many business challenges over the last several years."

— Karen Barbour,
The Barbour
Group, LLC

Maryland. "She has overcome all obstacles and has achieved great success," shared Russell C Teter, III, director, Carroll County (Md.) Small Business Development Center.

In 2008 Barbour added to her long list of accomplishments by becoming SBA's Maryland Small Business Person of the Year. "The SBA and SBDC have helped my company overcome many business challenges over the last

several years, including creating a strategic business plan" Barbour said. "Both programs are run by qualified personnel with real world small business experience. SBA and SBDC programs have exposed me to profitable business practices that can be easily tailored to my industry/market."

Her advocacy work includes being instrumental in passing state legislation

in 2006 which allows alternative bonding solutions for contractors bidding on publicly funded work in Maryland. Barbour continues to volunteer her time sharing her experience and expertise with others through involvement in SBDC and SBA events throughout Maryland; such as instructing SBDC classes on legal and insurance issues and smart approaches to protecting businesses.

Barbour has served on the corporate boards of several key construction industry groups, including the National Minority Building Industry Association, the American Subcontractors Association, the Maryland Procurement Technical Assistance Program, and the Washington Building Congress.

She is also committed to community and civic affairs. Since 2004, Barbour has chaired the company's fundraising committee for the Muscular Dystrophy Association, exceeding every fundraising goal and earning top individual fundraiser status in the Baltimore area. In civic affairs, she often testifies on proposed state legislation that will impact small businesses. In fact, several key state legislators regularly request her counsel on property and casualty insurance and surety bonding. "I truly believe that part of being a good citizen of a community is spending time in that community and aiding other members—lifting them up just as someone once did for me," said Barbour.

The Barbour Group represents many leading national and regional corporate sureties and has expertise in securing both domestic and international bonds. TBC provides surety bonds for the construction industry in more than 30 states, and 4 international countries; as well as commercial insurance for contractors.

"The surety industry is an age-old industry steeped in tradition and tends to be quite conservative in its operating style," she said. "In 1985, when I began as a contract bond underwriter, few women held such positions or higher. In 1993, I left the company to become a bonding producer/agent for a leading agency in the D.C. Metro area. I was the first female bond producer in the region."

"As a bonding agent surviving on commission income I could put my skills to task and drive to my highest abilities," said Barbour. "I decided to form my own agency and employ new ways of marketing bonds to enable small business, woman and minority firms more success in capturing the bonding capacity they needed to survive and grow in the marketplace. As an entrepreneur the risk reward principle becomes more pronounced, more real, and enables an exciting adventure for me and my agency. To be the first bonding agent recognized as the U.S. SBA's Maryland Small Business Person of the Year validates my belief that a new approach to surety brokerage was desperately needed."

After two years of operation she went online and discovered what the Small Business Administration and her local SBDC had to offer. She put into practice the principles of what she learned from SBA training courses and counseling and today is a recognized successful business leader.

"Deciding where to deploy scarce company resources to achieve the greatest return for the agency was always a difficult task as a new business owner," said Barbour. "I needed immediate growth to survive. The SBA and SBDC offered several courses on developing a strategic marketing plan and a sales plan. We relied on the information provided by the SBA and SBDC, reallocating resources and

challenging our assumptions about what "we" thought our customers needed. We first utilized the SBA and SBDC programs in the fall 2005."

The Barbour Group has since achieved a three-year growth rate of 352 percent. For example, in fiscal 2006, revenue was \$1,592,569 compared with revenues reaching \$4.5 million in fiscal 2008; that is revenue growth of 182 percent versus 2006. At inception the company employed two and today the staff has grown to seven.

Barbour is motivated to maintain a supportive home environment for her children. She puts her children first, ensures that both children can pursue their wide educational and extracurricular interests. Her children see their mother as a doer and as a successful business owner despite the disparity in being a single parent.

What's next for The Barbour Group? Barbour plans to increase use of technology to automate company workflows and improve productivity, expand use of strategic partnerships and drive growth acquisition of at least one independent insurance agency.

"Both SBA and SBDC continuously update their programs to address the needs of growing businesses. Recently, we participated in one-to-one counseling sessions with the SBDC to review our draft three-year strategic business plan. Our SBDC counselor pointed out several strengths and weaknesses within our business plan. He then asked us to consider several alternative strategies relevant to our industry and marketplace. The quality of the SBDC's advice would've cost us hundreds if not thousands of dollars had we had hired a private sector management consulting firm."

Working Smarter and Harder Than Their Competition

**By Joanna Mounce Stancil
SBA Office of Marketing
& Customer Service**

Taking advantage of the SBA's programs for small business development - coupled with hard work - has helped put GS5, LLC (GS5) on the right road to taking a dream and turning it into a successful

business. GS5 is an 8(a) small disadvantaged business providing a range of program and acquisition management support services to the Department of Defense and commercial clients.

Located in Dumfries, Va., the company is jointly owned by Bobby Blackwell, president; Michael Wood, executive vice president and secretary; John Gorsuch, executive vice president and treasurer; and Darrell Childs, executive vice president.

When asked how they balance the a four-way partnership, Blackwell said, "The four-way partnership works because we have implemented a well defined management structure and decision making process. In addition and perhaps most important, we share common values, ethics, and vision for our small business. We complement each other due our diversity in interest, skills, experience, and background."

In 2008 Blackwell was honored during SBA's National Small Business Week as a Regional Prime Contractor of the Year. A visit to the company Web



"To date, we have assisted several individuals establish a small business and have referred them to the SBA for guidance. We will continue to interface with the SBA for counseling and online services."

— Bobby Blackwell,
GS5, LLC

site reveals two statements that demonstrate why SBA chose GS5 for this award; Working Smarter and Harder than our Competition and Providing Superior On-Demand Business Solutions.

"The SBA award served as validation that our associates - on a daily basis - provide superior acquisition, business management, and intelligence support services to our clients and recognizes our management team's ability to effectively lead and manage a small business in the competitive DOD environment," said Blackwell. "The award also provides GS5 a free marketing opportunity, exposing our business to potential clients and peers within the small and large business community."

Founded in 2003, GS5 has been on the fast track. Just six months after its founding GS5 became an SBA-certified HUBZone company and won its first prime contract with the DOD. Like many companies, GS5 experienced its share of hardships and challenges but persevered as one of the fastest growing business management entities within DOD.

“Initially, the HUBZone contract vehicle provided GS5 a way to establish a contract base. Given our growth and inability to satisfy minimum HUBZone program requirements, we are no longer a HUBZone company and now leverage the 8(a) vehicle as a method to establish contracts with the government,” said Blackwell.

The company has bolstered its service array to support program managers with responsibility for command-and-control programs, intelligence operations and mission systems development. GS5’s use of SBA socioeconomic contract programs has provided the federal government with ready and available access to GS5’s products and services while reducing both time to award and cost to the government; it has also helped GS5 grow and establish itself within command-and-control and intelligence domains.

Early in the company’s development, Blackwell and his associates understood the value of doing their homework and having a well thought out business strategy. “We conducted a detailed strength, weakness, opportunity and threat analysis. This helped us target specific opportunities we were capable of winning and successfully executing. It helped us to provide the right personnel and products,” said Blackwell.” “We accessed the needs of the community, specially those needs following civilian draw down and in response to DoD requirements; counter-improvised explosive device and intelligence product development.”

In the past two years, GS5 has experienced a tremendous growth. Staff has grown from 25 to 70 employees, a 180 percent increase and revenue has

increased from \$2.5 million to \$8.9 million, a 230 percent increase. “As we grow we will maintain our small business culture and maintain our current core of highly specialized and professional workforce,” said Blackwell. “Prior to graduation from the 8(a) program, we will institutionalize effective business process required to compete successfully in the open market.”

Goals for the future include receiving a GSA schedule contract, migration of the current suite of program management tools to a Web-based environment, and maintain business growth consistent with their business plan. In addition, they plan to extend their products and services, as well as, their business and programs management software to an expanded DoD and commercial clientele.

The company’s relationship with the SBA has proven extremely successful as evidenced by GS5’s recent set-aside contact award to support the Defense Information System Agency, the U.S.Army, and other organizations within the Department of Defense. “The Richmond SBA office was able to process 8(a) award documents at a surprisingly quick rate. The quick turn-around impressed our clients and motivated them to do more business with our company and the SBA,” said Blackwell.

Blackwell says that they plan to continue their relationship with the SBA, perhaps in a mentor role. “To date, we have assisted several individuals establish a small business and have referred them to the SBA for guidance. We will continue to interface with the SBA for counseling and online services.”

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