

21. WEST VIRGINIA EXECUTIVE -- U.S. Small Business Administration Matchmaking Events Pay Off

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Adrienne Morgan, a first generation born Hispanic American, was born with entrepreneurial blood. Her father, who came to the United States not knowing English and without a high school diploma, has owned and operated a successful paint contracting company for more than 30 years.

“I grew up listening to the struggles and heart-aches of owning a small business while sitting around the dinner table,” states Morgan. Those struggles didn’t deter Morgan from wanting to follow in her father’s footsteps and one day opening her own business.

Morgan received her environmental degree from Boston University and spent seven years working for the Nature Conservancy in Virginia. She and her husband were ready to move back to his hometown of Charles Town, West Virginia to raise their family in the wide-open spaces the land offered with close proximity to the District of Columbia. This move gave Morgan the opportunity she had dreamed of – to open her own business.

In 2004, Morgan and her husband started A-Zone Environmental Services, LLC providing environmental services in site investigation, environmental drilling, and remediation for site re-development services. Through guidance from the Small Business Development Center in Martinsburg, Morgan learned about the benefits of SBA’s 8(a) program. In 2010, Morgan received her acceptance letter into the program and began her journey of Government Contracting. Since its inception into the 8(a) program, A-Zone has experienced business growth in sales and revenue. Today, A-Zone offers environmental services in assessment and compliance, environmental remediation, field services and drilling.

The 8(a) Business Development program is a nine-year program established to assist eligible socially and economically disadvantaged individuals to develop and grow their businesses. Business development assistance includes one-on-one counseling, training workshops, match-making opportunities with federal buyers and other management and technical guidance. Morgan attended DyNet, a SBA matchmaking event, in 2011 and made contact with the Huntington District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Morgan knew this was an agency that would be a good fit for her company.

After the DyNet Conference, Morgan continued to take advantage of the business development opportunities through the 8(a) program and grow her business. A year and a half after her first connection with the Huntington District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Morgan reached out to Melissa Loder, SBA West Virginia District Office Business Development Specialist, to see if she could set up a capabilities presentation to the agency.

Loder scheduled the meeting giving A-Zone the opportunity to showcase the services they offer. A year later, the agency called Morgan notifying her of a bid coming up that would be a perfect match for her company. A-Zone was recently awarded the \$1.9M contract that includes operating and maintaining the ground water treatment center at the former West Virginia Ordnance Works site in Point Pleasant, WV.

“I knew this meeting would be a goldmine of opportunity for both stakeholders,” said Loder. “Adrienne was well prepared and the meeting was a great way for the agency to learn what the small business could bring to the table.”

Morgan credits Loder, “Melissa and the SBA have been wonderful in linking us to prospective government clients; it has really opened the door to current and potential procurement awards.”

These matchmaking events don’t always result in immediate gratification. Still, Morgan has nothing but praises for the program, “The SBA and the 8(a) program really help small business grow and provides them opportunities that they would never have had access to. With the knowledge learned from the SBA, the sky is the limit on how much you can grow your company.”

The West Virginia District Office of the U.S. Small Business Administration is set to participate in the 2014 DyNet Conference, April 2, 2014 at the Robert H. Mollohan Research Center in Fairmont. To learn more about the SBA and the 8(a) program visit www.sba.gov or contact Melissa Loder at [\(304\)623-5631](tel:3046235631)