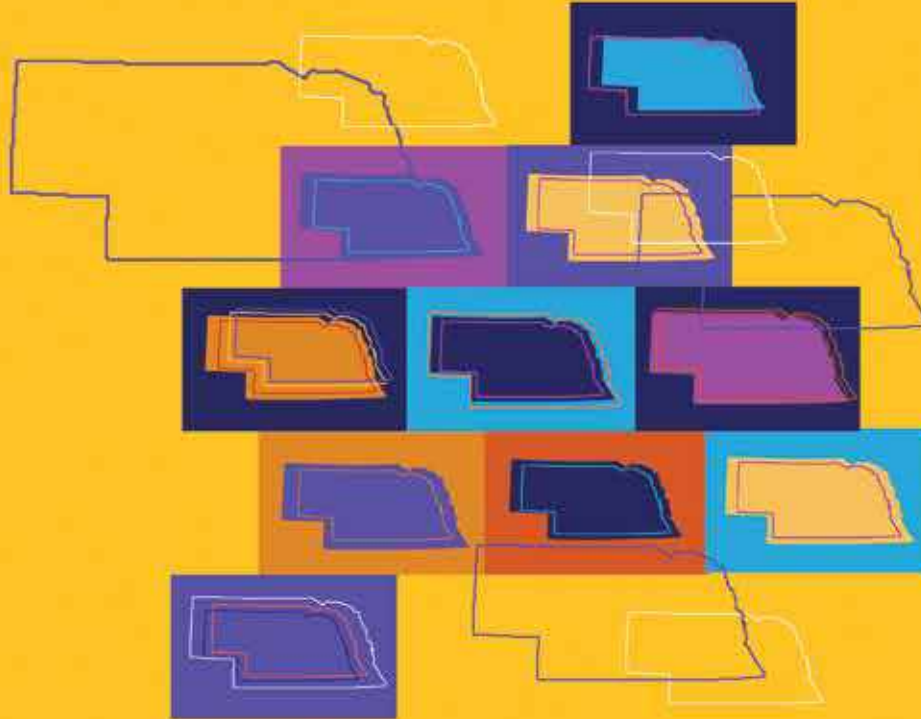


# Nebraska Business Development Center



***nbdc***<sup>®</sup>

## 2014 ANNUAL REPORT



UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT OMAHA  
COLLEGE OF  
BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION



[nbdc.unomaha.edu](http://nbdc.unomaha.edu)

NebraskaBusinessDevelopmentCenter

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## DEAR FRIENDS OF NBDC

Each year we recognize six small businesses for their contributions to the Nebraska economy. We are particularly pleased that this year our honorees represent the geographical diversity of Nebraska.

Working from east to west, there is Mark VII Enterprises, the NBDC Government Contractor of the Year, from Omaha; KZCO, Inc., the NBDC Manufacturing Business of the Year from Ashland; LI-COR Biosciences, Inc., the NBDC Innovation Business of the Year, from Lincoln; Bruckman Rubber Co., the NBDC Export Business of the Year, from Hastings; Greenhouse in the Snow, Inc., the NBDC Sustainability Business of the Year, from Alliance; and Gary's Cleaning and Restoration, LLC, the NBDC Champion of Small Business, from Scottsbluff.

This geographical distribution wasn't the result of manipulation. These businesses were selected by the NBDC Advisory Board and they clearly won their spots. Although there may have been some unintentional engineering (if engineering is ever unintentional) because our awardees were among those nominated by our NBDC consultants. And, NBDC consultants are providing services across Nebraska.

## Qualified consultants

We are proud of our NBDC consultants, who are among the most highly qualified small business consultants in any small business development center or procurement technical assistance center program in the United States. In addition to their academic degrees and real world experience, every NBDC small business development center consultant completes the Economic Development Finance Professional certification from the National Development Council

and every NBDC procurement assistance consultant completes the professional designation from the Association of Procurement Technical Assistance Centers. We invest in this continuous training for our people because we know it brings continuing benefits to entrepreneurs in Nebraska.

## Employment is the objective

This year we completed an 18-month study of small business development in rural Nebraska. The study was done under a grant from the University of Nebraska Rural Futures Institute. We found that the most successful communities in economic growth were those that were successful in encouraging the development of employer small businesses. That is, small businesses that employ at least five people. These communities want successful small businesses because they mean economic growth and quality of life.

Too often, small businesses are dismissed as unimportant because of a perceived high failure rate. But, small businesses with employees are surprisingly stable. The most volatile part of the small business sector is those businesses with no employees. In Nebraska, nonemployer small businesses make up more than 70% of small business establishments. They provide a core part of our economy but real economic growth comes from employers. NBDC makes real efforts to help businesses grow. We make those efforts in the most fundamental way, by helping businesses raise capital and by helping businesses find customers.

## Economic impact

In 2014 our consultants helped small businesses in Nebraska secure \$61,539,894 to invest in their businesses. That is a 63% increase over 2013, which represents an improved business climate but it also

Above: Robert Bernier, state director; Jean Waters, programs manager; Harold Sargus, client services manager

represents hard work by our consultants in helping businesses secure commercial loans, with or without an SBA guarantee.

In 2014 our consultants helped small businesses in Nebraska increase sales by \$118,750,000. The largest portion was in government contracting but the increased sales also was through additional commercial customers in the United States and internationally.

### Partnerships

In achieving these results, NBDC relies on the great partnerships we have with the University of Nebraska at Kearney, Southeast Community College, Mid-Plains Community College, Chadron State College and Wayne State College. Of course, we also enjoy the support of the University of Nebraska at Omaha, which is the lead institution for the small business development center and procurement technical assistance center programs in Nebraska.

We also rely on your support and we pledge to keep to our mission of Helping Good Businesses Become Better.



*Louis Pol* *Robert E. Bernier*

Louis Pol, PhD  
John Becker Dean  
College of Business Administration  
University of Nebraska at Omaha



Robert E. Bernier, PhD,  
Assistant Dean, State Director  
Nebraska Business Development Center  
College of Business Administration  
University of Nebraska at Omaha

## NBDC 2014 ECONOMIC IMPACT



**1,061**  
jobs created  
or saved



**\$6.81**  
tax revenue  
for every \$1  
invested in  
NBDC



**2,545**  
clients served  
by NBDC



**87**  
Nebraska  
counties served  
by NBDC

# We mean business. We mean Nebraska

In 2015, the Association of Small Business Development Centers will be celebrating the 35th anniversary of the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) program. The Nebraska Business Development Center (NBDC) is a member of the Association. We believe this to be a worthy celebration of a program that has helped small businesses obtain more than \$38 billion in financing since 2002. But, we won't be making a big deal of this celebration in Nebraska because NBDC celebrated its 35th anniversary in 2012.

## Panhandle to the Missouri River

Before Congress passed the Small Business Development Center Act of 1980, the U.S. Small Business Administration conducted a demonstration project that they called University Business Development Centers. The University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) was one of eight universities selected in 1977 for the demonstration project. Two of the eight universities implemented statewide delivery during the demonstration project, UNO and the University of Georgia. That model was incorporated into the law passed by Congress. Today, there is an SBDC program in every state, every territory and the District of Columbia.

NBDC implemented a statewide program by sharing its federal funds with other higher education institutions in Nebraska. In 1977, that included the University of Nebraska – Lincoln, Kearney State College, Wayne State College and Chadron State College.

The Small Business Development Center Act changed the contract demonstration program into a

cooperative agreement grant program, which means that the recipient organization must match the federal dollars. UNO received a state appropriation to provide matching funds for NBDC in 1985. NBDC used those funds to open offices in Scottsbluff and North Platte.

Over the years, NBDC has asked its partner institutions to provide matching funds and to devote full-time consultants to the project. The SBDC program provides federal funding through a formula that is based on a state's population as a share of the total population of the U.S. and its territories. Nebraska's population is a little

less than six tenths of one percent of the total. That makes Nebraska one of several minimum funded states making it difficult for NBDC to provide an office in every town that deserves one.

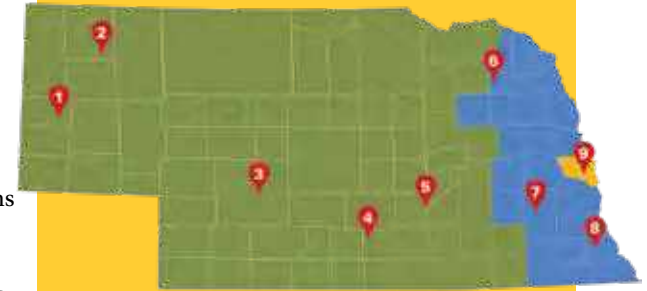
However, NBDC has made a special effort to provide assistance across the state no matter the population level and in 2014, served small business clients in 87 Nebraska counties.

## Nebraska shares in government contracts

The procurement technical assistance program came to NBDC in 1995. It is a cooperative agreement funded by the Defense Logistics Agency, U.S. Department of Defense. Its purpose is to help small businesses qualify for and compete for government contracts. NBDC has placed procurement consultants in its Omaha, Lincoln, Kearney and Wayne offices.

In calendar year 2014, NBDC served 2,545 small business clients. The procurement clients obtained

*When small business grows the economy of Nebraska improves and the quality of life in Nebraska improves.*



### Congressional Districts

District 1 District 2 District 3

### NBDC Consulting Centers

- |                |           |
|----------------|-----------|
| 1 Scottsbluff  | 6 Wayne   |
| 2 Chadron      | 7 Lincoln |
| 3 North Platte | 8 Auburn  |
| 4 Kearney      | 9 Omaha   |
| 5 Grand Island |           |

\$67,182,191 in government contracts. Although Nebraska does not get a fair share of federal government contracts, NBDC assistance helps improve the performance of Nebraska businesses in government contracting and that is important to Nebraska's economic health.

But, sales to the government are not the only avenue NBDC pursues. NBDC also helped its clients obtain \$51,567,809 in sales to other customers—from local retail to international sales.

## Profiting from innovation

Many small businesses that benefit from NBDC assistance are manufacturers, distributors, and research and development firms. Some of these firms engage NBDC to assist with their pursuit of new technologies. In 2014, NBDC worked with 80 small business clients seeking to develop new high technology products for the marketplace.

The federal government has a special program

for small businesses seeking to develop innovative new products. Each of the 11 agencies with the largest research budgets in the federal government must set aside 2.5% of their budget to contract with small businesses. The program is called the Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) program. When people talk about grants to small businesses from the federal budget, this is the program they mean.

*NBDC is proud of our clients and we are confident that the people of Nebraska are better off with a vibrant small business community.*

The competition for SBIR funds is intense and most of the money goes to California and Massachusetts, the states with the highest number of high technology firms. When reviewing SBIR applications, the federal agencies review not only the scientific and technical merit but also the commercialization plan. It is in the commercialization plan that NBDC can provide valuable assistance to companies pursuing SBIR funding. Of the 80 SBIR clients in 2014, 45 submitted applications. Of these, 13 won federal SBIR awards totaling \$2,961,735. It is through efforts like these that NBDC small business clients created or saved 1,061 jobs. The saved jobs helped Nebraska avoid \$2,070,000 in unemployment compensation payouts.

## NBDC PARTNERS



Wayne State  
College



**VERONICA DOGA** is an export consultant and the new director of the NBDC procurement technical assistance program

## *Fast-track program helps businesses find new markets in U.S. and abroad*

**T**en companies from across Nebraska took part in the first Intensive Entrepreneurship Program, offered in the fall of 2014 by the Nebraska Business Development Center (NBDC) in Omaha.

Veronica Doga, NBDC export consultant and market research analyst, said the goals of the program included increasing participant business sales through expansion into new markets in the US and abroad, teaching how to do business internationally, understanding how to use comprehensive market research and growth analysis to create an accelerated business strategy, and how to take advantage of existing resources.

Participating companies, who took part at no cost, came from Omaha, Hastings, Grand Island, York, Ashland, Lyons, Holdrege, Lincoln, Laurel and Arlington.

The program began with a webinar in August, followed by three monthly meetings. At the end of the program, the growth evaluation and research reports were delivered to the participants. Doga says she is planning a follow-up visit with the participants in 2015.

## Participating companies received

**READ MORE** about companies that participated in this program on pages 17, 25, and 30.

- **Growth Evaluation Report** that analyzed the capacity participant companies have for expansion and identified any deficiencies
- **Market Research Report** that identified potential new markets, advantages and competition in that market, and barriers to success
- **One-on-one business consulting** included expert assistance with specific exporting issues
- **Training, information and resources** for conducting business in other countries.

## Business Plan Loan Packaging Market Research Business Valuation Succession Planning Capital Access



INGRID BATTERSHELL



TIM DONAHUE



SARA MCMILLAN



ZACK ZIMMERMAN



ODEE INGERSOLL



LOREN KUCERA

## Lean Enterprise Process Improvement



CHARLIE MCPHERSON



ARETHA PRODJINOTHO



ROGER MCCULLOUGH



RENEE HELD



JERRY PARRIOTT  
BUSINESS MANAGER

## Government Contracting BidMatching Subcontracting Registrations Exporting



VERONICA DOGA



MARY GRAFF



CHUCK BECK



ROGER JOHNSON



JASON BOUSQUET



DICK UHING

## Technology Commercialization Sustainability Professional & Organizational Development



MARISOL RODRIGUEZ



JEAN WATERS



RICK YODER



HAROLD SARGUS



BETH GIESBRECHT



KIM HARTER

## Consultants are true professionals

It is fair to wonder how NBDC does it. What do we do that enables investment in small businesses and helps businesses increase sales? NBDC does it through professional services. We do not try to hire people who were once business owners or who have worked in business in a corporate capacity. The Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE) already does a good job in mentorship. NBDC hires people who have professional skills and enhance those skills through professional development. We take the same approach to working with small business owners as would an accountant or attorney or banker or any other professional.

All NBDC procurement consultants achieve the Certified Procurement Professional designation from the Association of Procurement Technical Assistance Centers. This enables them to guide Nebraska small businesses through the Systems for Awards Management process that is essential for government contracting.

All of our consultants in the SBDC program have business degrees, many have advanced degrees.

All of them have completed the Economic Development Finance Professional certification from the National Development Council. They are all members of the Risk Management Associates, the professional organization for bank commercial loan officers. They have also taken the time to do additional professional development on SBA processes for 7a guarantee loans and SBA 504 loans. They know how to put together deals that involve different forms of financing and how to structure deals to improve the potential for financing to be approved.

*It is the courage, skill and determination of the small business owner that make small businesses a vital part of the fabric of Nebraska.*



Beth Giesbrecht, lead instructor in project management

In addition, our SBDC program consultants have consistently improved their knowledge base throughout their careers with NBDC.

Odee Ingersoll in Kearney, Zack Zimmerman in Lincoln and Sara McMillan in Grand Island have each achieved certification as a Certified Valuation Analyst from the National Association of Certified Valuators and Analysts.

Loren Kucera, in Wayne, has served on the Board of Directors of the Nebraska Economic Development Corporation (NEDCO), a certified development company. NEDCO and Community Development Resources, another certified development company, are the organizations in Nebraska that can make SBA 504 loans.

Ingrid Battershell, in Scottsbluff, is an expert in SBA 504 loans (having served on the NEDCO loan review committee) and is an expert on small business taxation. She has assisted businesses by providing monthly monitoring services on their financial performance that enables them to meet

loan covenants, improve performance and minimize tax obligations.

Aretha Prodjinotho, the lead consultant in Omaha, holds both a Master of Business Administration degree and a Master of Science in Information Systems degree from the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Her knowledge makes her particularly effective providing guidance to technology businesses.

## Building better operations, managers and teams

NBDC also provides noncredit instruction and consulting in operations management. That service is not subsidized by any federal funding tied to small business assistance. NBDC provides the service to businesses and organizations of any size and the service is paid for by the tuition and fees.

Under the Professional and Organizational Development banner, NBDC offers public workshops, custom training, and coaching in LEAN process engineering, leadership and team building, project management and other subjects. Certification preparation courses are offered for sustainable building, human resource and project management professionals.

NBDC began its project management courses in 2000, responding to a high level of demand by businesses engaged in government contracting. Project management remains the most popular of NBDC noncredit offerings. Beth Giesbrecht, lead NBDC instructor, holds the Project Management Professional credential from the Project Management Institute.

NBDC offers its own Certificate in Project Management that several large organizations in Omaha use as a basic credential for their employees with project management responsibilities. NBDC also provides

preparation courses for those interested in pursuing the Project Management Institute credentials—the Certified Associate in Project Management (CAPM) and the Project Management Professional (PMP).

In working with many larger corporations and organizations, NBDC customizes noncredit course offerings to meet the specific needs of those organizations and to use specific examples within the operations of those organizations.



**TURN THE PAGE and travel across Nebraska to visit 12 NBDC clients who have experienced a year of business growth and success in 2014. Among these are the six businesses nominated by NBDC consultants and selected by the Advisory Board to receive the 2014 Business of the Year awards. In addition, we visit a diverse group of businesses that have put NBDC's broad range of services and support to good use.**



# MITCHELL VALLEY ANIMAL HOSPITAL

NEBRASKA BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CENTER



## Realizing a dream of business ownership

**Y**ears ago when she was in high school in Sidney, Neb., Somer Tremain worked for local veterinarian Ken Cook, bathing and walking dogs and watching closely as Dr. Cook administered care to his four-legged patients.

Now a skilled veterinarian, small business owner, wife and mother, Dr. Somer Pieper has a shadow of her own—her 7-year-old daughter, Kate—as she cares for small animals in her state-of-the-art clinic, Mitchell Valley Animal Hospital.

“She comes in every day after school,” Dr. Pieper says. “She likes to help.”

There is plenty to do at the Mitchell Valley Animal Hospital, which opened in June 2014. Dr. Pieper first recognized the need for a pet hospital in Mitchell Valley when she worked at a clinic in Torrington, Wyo., 23 miles to the west of Mitchell, after her graduation from the Kansas State University College of Veterinary Medicine in 2008.

Dr. Pieper earned bachelor’s and master’s degrees from Chadron State College. While in college, she worked for a Chadron veterinarian, John Gamby.

While studying at KSU, she worked as a veterinary student for the U.S. Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.



In 2008, she and her husband, Jeff, moved back to his family farm in Mitchell. Today, he is the branch president for Pinnacle Bank in Mitchell.

With assistance and advice from the Nebraska Business Development Center office in Scottsbluff (see sidebar), Dr. Pieper was able to realize her dream, the Mitchell Valley Animal Hospital. The thriving business employs four licensed veterinary technicians, two certified assistants and a part-time office manager.

The hospital features the latest in equipment and technologies including digital radiography, in-house blood testing equipment and an electronic patient records system conveniently maintained on laptop computers.

“If we need to consult with a specialist, having all our records and images available electronically makes collaboration much easier,” Dr. Pieper says.

The hospital provides preventive and emergency care for the smallest of pets on up to sheep and goats. “We’re starting to broaden our horizons a bit,” Dr. Pieper says, “as long as we can continue to deliver the high-quality care our clients and their animals have come to expect from us.”

### NBDC HELPS COMMUNITY GET A STATE-OF-THE-ART CLINIC

**W**hen veterinarian Somer Pieper wanted to open her own animal hospital, she went to see Ingrid Battershell, director of the Nebraska Business Development Center’s office in Scottsbluff.

“Ingrid’s office was only eight miles away,” Dr. Pieper says. “It was easy to set appointments, and at each meeting, she’d help me establish goals for the next meeting.”

Their first meeting was Nov. 11, 2012. Battershell assisted in cash flow projections, Pro Forma financial statements and loan documents, as well as Dr. Pieper’s SBA 504 application. Construction on the \$865,000 facility began in the fall of 2013 and the Mitchell Valley Animal Hospital opened its doors the following June.

“Right from our first meeting, Ingrid was extremely helpful,” Dr. Pieper says. “I couldn’t have done it without her.”



# Gary's CLEANING & RESTORATION



The **Champion of Small Business Award** is presented annually to a Nebraska small business owner who has triumphed in the field of business and is an empowering entrepreneur who stands up for other small business owners.

NEBRASKA BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CENTER

## Nebraska Champions of Small Business Since 1983

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1983 Jack Barnhart, Barnhart Press, Omaha                         | 1993 Bob Campos, Campos Construction Co., Omaha           |
| Robert Hoig, Midlands Business Journal, Omaha                     |   |
| 1984 Ronald Kennedy, Kessler, Kennedy & Assoc., Omaha             | 1994 Phillip C. Nelson, Hamilton Telephone Co., Aurora    |
| 1985 Ken Wortman, Wortman Enterprises, Aurora                     | 1995 J. Richard Abramson, Prairie Systems, Inc., Omaha    |
| 1986 Paul Dutton, Dutton & Associates PC, Omaha                   | 1996 Tom Feller, Feller & Company, Wisner                 |
| 1987 Irving Rushall, Scottsbluff Pipe and Supply, Scottsbluff     | 1997 Clark Griffith, Medical Center Pharmacy, Scottsbluff |
| 1988 Edwin J. Loutzenheiser Jr., Pheonix Industries, Inc. Juniata | 1998 Deborah Bass, Bass & Associates, Omaha               |
| 1989 Roy Smith, H.P. Smith Motors, Inc., Omaha                    | 1999 Kerry Winterer, The Benefit Group, Omaha             |
| 1990 Carol Corey, Ark Printing & Graphics, Omaha                  | 2000 John and Karen Miskimins                             |
| 1991 Maxine Maul, Maverick Media, Syracuse                        | Miskimins Motor Co., Inc., Chadron                        |
| 1992 Joyce McLaughlin, InterState Telemarketing, Inc., Omaha      | 2001 Jim J. Jenkins, Whiskey Creek Steakhouses, Kearney   |
|   | 2003 David Alan Chally, Barney Insurance, Inc., Kearney   |

# 2014 CHAMPION OF SMALL BUSINESS

When Roger Franklin was considering purchasing Gary's Cleaning & Restoration in Scottsbluff, Neb., from founder and owner Gary Schaub, he wanted to be certain the business was a good fit for him and his wife, Lela.

So he started looking at Gary's Cleaning from the inside—by becoming one of Schaub's employees. "Within 30 days," Franklin recalls, "I knew it was a solid business and something we could manage."

In the time since purchasing Gary's Cleaning & Restoration in 2000, Franklin has succeeded in growing the business and a reputation for top-quality service and personalized customer care.

Two years ago, Franklin came to the Nebraska Business Development Center (NBDC) in Scottsbluff with a plan to expand Gary's Cleaning. "We wanted to upgrade our computers, add asbestos removal and expand into other markets," he recalls.

He consulted with Ingrid Battershell, director of the NBDC office in Scottsbluff. "She helped draw up a road map as to how we could get it all done,"

Franklin says. "Since then, we've become certified in asbestos removal, and we've upgraded our computers so we can work remotely and track all the information we keep."

Roger embodies the qualities of the Nebraska entrepreneur. He's optimistic, hard working and involved in his community.

Gary's Cleaning provides commercial and residential carpet cleaning, smoke, fire and water damage restoration; and reconstruction services—drywall, ceiling, flooring, plumbing, electrical and painting. Sub-contractors are used for plumbing and electrical services. Gary's employs 21 people, up from six employees at the time Franklin purchased the business.

Franklin is the day to day manager. While his wife is part owner of the cleaning business, she owns her own business called Tree House Interiors. "We found out early on that we work better together when we're apart," Franklin jokes.

He says the Nebraska Business Development Center helped with several aspects of his wife's business, an interior decorating and consulting service, from writing a business plan to financing and logistics.

The Franklins believe in giving back to the community and are involved in many volunteer organizations and activities. Lela has served as president of the Downtown Business Association where she



worked with members to promote businesses and the downtown area. Roger serves on the board of the Business Improvement District, which focuses on improving the business environment of the Scottsbluff downtown district.

In 2011, the couple formed a 501(c)(3) called "Ican Youcan Wecan" to collect and distribute canned and non-perishable food for the residents of the Pine Ridge Reservation and the local Guadalupe Center food pantry. Gary's Cleaning and other local businesses team up to offer customers a discount if they contribute canned goods during the annual food drive.

The Franklins and their employees also participate in "The Mathew Project" volunteering to contribute a complete meal each month via a mobile food kitchen. Potter's Wheel, a local charitable organization, often serves people who are also looking for jobs. Gary's Cleaning has hired several employees through Potter's Wheel.

"Roger has a proven record of successful business ownership," Battershell says. "He is a promoter of small business in this community and a volunteer in activities to make the Scottsbluff-Gering area successful."

- 2004 Patricia Crittenden, Flowers on Broadway, Scottsbluff
- 2005 Terry and Dena Mills, Mills Hardware, Arnold
- 2006 Ervin Eisenmenger, WestPoint Implement, West Point
- 2007 Jeff White, Haque Quality Water, Lincoln
- 2008 Jim and Connie Hellbusch, Duo Lift Manufacturing Co., Inc. Columbus
- 2009 Nick Bock and James Bowen, Five NinesTechnology Group, LLC, Lincoln
- 2010 Michael L. Mawby, Come and Get It, Kearney
- 2011 Kelly Newell, Scout Goods & Trade, Omaha
- 2012 Jim and Tim Schneider, S&S Plumbing, Mitchell
- 2013 Douglas Garwood, Garwood Enterprises Inc., Dakota City
- 2014 Roger Franklin, Gary's Cleaning and Restoration, Scottsbluff



The **Sustainability Business of the Year** is awarded to a Nebraska business that has demonstrated leadership incorporating environmental sustainability as a strategic business value that has resulted in improved business performance.

2011—Signs and Shapes International  
2012—ServiceMaster  
2013—The Grey Plume  
2014—Greenhouse in the Snow



## GREENHOUSE IN THE SNOW

## 2014 SUSTAINABILITY BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

**R**uss Finch has turned what began as a hobby when he retired from the U.S. Postal Service 20-plus years ago into a unique greenhouse business that some people have to see to believe.

The 82-year-old Alliance, Neb. resident has created a greenhouse in which the indoor climate is warmed in the winter and cooled in the summer simply by utilizing the Earth's natural temperature eight feet underground, where it is a constant 52 degrees Fahrenheit. The only energy used to maintain the temperature in his greenhouses is a 10-inch wheel blower that circulates air. His geothermal concept conserves energy and reduces greenhouse costs.

Now in the business of marketing his unique greenhouse design to others around the country, Finch relies upon the advice of Tim Donahue and Jennifer Wittrock at the Nebraska Business Development Center in Chadron. "We have talked over all kinds of management issues," Finch says. "We didn't need financing, but we did need to know how we could help get SBA and other financing for people interested in buying the greenhouse units."

Through his company, Greenhouse in the Snow, Finch sells detailed instructions for building the greenhouses, along with frames and Lexan Polycarbonate glazing in six-foot modules. "We give precise information how to fabricate and construct the units," he says. "Everything else they need is available at their local home construction store."

To date, Finch has sold 15 greenhouse units to

buyers in six states, 90-percent of which are being used for commercial plant production.

The idea originated as a heating system for Finch's home. "When I approached people about it, they said it couldn't be done," he recalls.

His idea worked, and more than a decade later, he decided to apply the same concept to a greenhouse. "I went to the so-called experts and they told

*I went to the  
so-called  
experts and  
they told us  
that it couldn't  
be done.*

us the same thing, that it couldn't be done," he says. "We were told repeatedly that it isn't feasible—even several years after we were using the greenhouse. So we started inviting people to come take a look."

He says his greenhouse concept is a sustainable, low-cost way to overcome harsh climates no matter the location in the U.S. "The ground temperature eight feet down is 52 degrees almost everywhere in the U.S., with a range of two to three degrees."

At his greenhouse in Alliance, Finch grows a variety of plants, tropical flowers and citrus. "We produce maybe 500 to 600 pounds (of fruit) per year on in-ground, 12-foot tall trees, some that we sell through a nearby farmer's market or just give to people who stop by," he says. "We also send some to seminars where they talk about our greenhouse, just as proof that it can be done."



"Greenhouse in the Snow has brought an innovation to the market that offers the possibility for a sustainable, new industry in Nebraska and other cold climate locations."—  
Tim Donahue, NBDC





# WILD BILL'S WINGS & BOWLING





## New traditions for an old business

**T**he Cedar Bowl bowling alley and bar had been a source of entertainment and camaraderie for residents of North Platte for more than 30 years when it startled avid keggers by going out of business in May 2014.

Two of those surprised by the sudden closure were North Platte businessmen Lonnie Parsons and Gary Suhr. "I actually bowled on a team with the former owner," recalls Suhr. "We knew he wanted to sell, but at the time, Lonnie and I had no intentions of buying the place."

Cedar Bowl sat empty for about a month, until word got around of an out-of-town buyer who was interested. "That's when I called Lonnie," Suhr says. "We both felt strongly that it should be locally owned."

So they went to see Charlie McPherson, director of the Nebraska Business Development Center (NBDC) office in North Platte, situated on the north campus of Mid-Plains Community College. McPherson immediately went to work and helped write the business plan that Parsons and Suhr

*We felt strongly that it should be locally owned.*

presented to the City of North Platte.

After receiving some city funding in the form of a grant and a loan from the city council and a commercial loan, the two men purchased the building in July and began a nearly \$3 million renovation project to transform Cedar Bowl into a new family destination, Wild Bill's Wings & Bowling.

"We received approval and started renovating the place the next day," Suhr says. "We knew we had to work fast so we could be open in time for fall leagues."

That is one reason they sought the help of McPherson at the NBDC. "We had a very limited time frame, and Charlie did an outstanding job for us in such a short time," Suhr says. "Without him, we never would have been able to get this done. He really went above and beyond to help us put our business plan together."

Renovations were extensive.

"We replaced all the lanes and we broke 10 lanes out," Suhr says. "We went down from 32 lanes to 22, and we put an arcade where the 10 lanes had been."

They also put in a billiards room and a banquet room, and gutted the space that formerly held a bar and nightclub to make room for their new restaurant. "We redid pretty much everything in the place from the pinsetters forward," he says.

Remarkably, the bowling alley opened for business on August 15. Wild Bill's Wings restaurant opened September 1.

The bowling alley features open bowling, league play, tournaments and popular weekly specials like cosmic bowling in the near-dark. The casual restaurant offers a full menu of homemade foods and a wide assortment of chicken wings with 25 different sauces including Caribbean jerk, hot chili and Asian.

Suhr says the hurried and hard work has proved worthwhile. "It's been very well received," he says. "We transformed it into a family atmosphere that everyone can come and enjoy."



A man with short blonde hair and glasses, wearing a red long-sleeved shirt, is smiling at the camera. He is standing in a factory or workshop. In the foreground, there are several large, black, circular rubber rings or seals. To his left is a large industrial machine with a yellow safety mesh. In the background, there are various mechanical parts and equipment on a workbench.

"Unusual for a business of this size, Bruckman Rubber Co. has developed a growing presence in the international marketplace." —  
Veronica Doga, NBDC

BRUCKMAN RUBBER CO

# 2014 EXPORT BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

In the past few years, Bruckman Rubber Co. in Hastings, Neb., has expanded its export business to account for 15 to 20 percent of its sales, with a goal of building that figure nearer to 30 percent, says President and CEO Jack Schreiner.

“Years ago, we didn’t do much overseas,” Schreiner says. “What really got our attention was when Gov. Heineman invited me to go on a trade mission. From that, I gained awareness and interest in international opportunities. We’ve since opened some doors, built some connections and are now taking a more proactive approach.”

Surprisingly, the cultural issues are what I find most rewarding.

That approach included participating in the Nebraska Business Development Center’s inaugural Intensive Entrepreneurship Program (IEP) in the fall of 2014.

Led by Veronica Doga, NBDC export consultant, the program’s goals include increasing a business’s sales through expansion into new markets in the U.S. and abroad, teaching how to do business in other countries, showing how comprehensive market research and forecasting analysis can create a smart business strategy, and offering professional business consulting services.

As part of IEP, Doga says, NBDC provided Bruckman Rubber with:

- Growth Evaluation Report, which analyzes the capacity a company has for expansion and identifies any deficiencies;
- Market Research Report to identify potential new markets, advantages, competition and market barriers;
- One-on-one business consulting including expert assistance with specific exporting issues; and
- Training, information and resources required to do business in other countries.

Schreiner says Doga “is a smart young lady. She’s very energetic and had some very good ideas for us.”

Bruckman Rubber Co. offers a full spectrum of rubber parts manufacturing capabilities, from making the molds to crafting parts and providing die-cutting operations.

The company was founded in 1961 by Chuck Bruckman. “It was a little hole-in-the-wall, one press operation,” says Schreiner, who joined the business 37 years ago. “Chuck borrowed \$750 for the first press, and the banker kept stopping by to make sure it was working.”

The company has since grown to 80 employees manufacturing thousands of different rubber products, all to customer specifications. Bruckman Rubber currently sells products throughout the U.S.



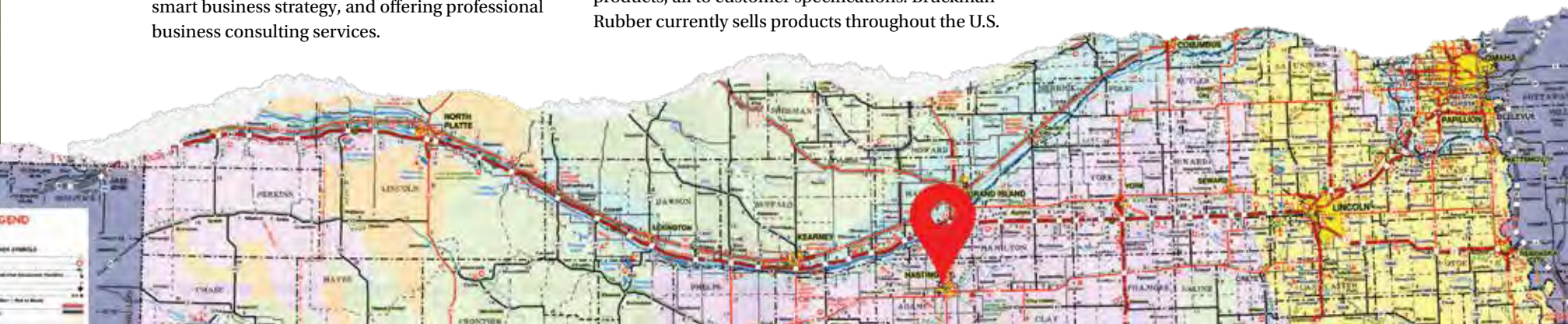
NBDC awards the **Export Business of the Year** to a Nebraska business that is successful in selling and delivering products or services internationally.

2013—Elliott Equipment Co.  
2014—Bruckman Rubber Co.

and in China, Mexico, Philippines, Canada, India, Japan and France.

Schreiner says there are challenges to overseas markets. “An organization of our size has limited resources,” he says. “There’s a commitment of time and travel, and the language and cultural barriers can be a problem.

“Surprisingly, the cultural issues are what I find most rewarding,” he says. “When I spend time learning about another culture in advance, once I’m there with the people, it’s an awesome experience.”





# RODEWAY INN®

BY CHOICE HOTELS



# Hospitality business builds on a reputation for service

**R**ick Milton built a career working for a number of different hotel chains in Ohio, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas and Nebraska.

Ultimately, Milton and his wife, Sandy, settled in Grand Island, Neb., where in 2006 they purchased what was then the Oak Grove Inn. Nathan DeLaet, a hotel management student who graduated in December 2006 from Central Community College in Hastings, was hired as general manager. The Oak Grove Inn soon became the state's first Rodeway Inn franchise.

When they bought the Oak Grove Inn, it was in need of significant repairs, DeLaet says. "We spent a great deal of time renovating the hotel," he says. "Even today, we are still doing all we can to make it better, upgrading the rooms and services whenever we can."

*Rodeway Inn staff goes above and beyond for guests.*

Rodeway Inn has 60 rooms and employs 13 people. The hotel has seen increases in sales since 2011, with a 15.3 percent increase in 2012 and a 6.0 percent increase in 2013.

The staff at Rodeway Inn strives to create the best experience possible for guests by going above and beyond, as recognized by several awards from Choice Hotels International

that note the hotel's commitment to hospitality and excellent guest service. For example, the hotel received the Platinum Hospitality Award in 2009, 2010 and 2015 for being a top 3 percent performer in the Rodeway Inn brand. Rodeway Inn has also earned the Gold Hospitality Award four years in a row (2011-2014) for being a top performing brand in the Choice Hotels International franchise.

DeLaet has received the General Manager Service Excellence Award from Choice Hotels International for his commitment to surpass guest service expectations. He has also received the Innovation Award from Choice Hotels International for his work "to implement innovative practices to increase guest satisfaction or hotel efficiency." The "special touches" at Rodeway Inn include fresh popcorn for each guest upon arrival and two-cent per gallon discounts at a nearby gas station.

After Rick Miller's death in 2009, Sandy Milton and DeLaet faced some decisions. Rather than pursue an RV park project previously envisioned for the area adjacent to Rodeway Inn, the two decided to build an extended stay hotel in association with Choice Hotels International, Rodeway Inn's parent company.

Planning for the extended stay hotel began in 2010. After a feasibility study was finalized, Milton and DeLaet approached Sara McMillan, business consultant with the Nebraska Business Development



Center, for assistance with a loan package for SBA guaranteed financing. The deal did not work out with the first lender, however, and the project was put on hold during the slowdown in the economy in 2011.

In 2013, the project received approval from the City of Grand Island for tax-increment financing and approval of a 504 loan. Milton and DeLaet will co-own MainStay Suites, the first extended stay hotel situated in Grand Island. With 58 rooms and 10 to 12 employees, it is due to open by this summer.





Cindy Pelan, Mary Ann Stallings, Robbie Nathan

## BRIDGE TO BETTER LIVING

NEBRASKA BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CENTER



## A strong vision is the foundation

**J**ust as Bridge to Better Living has found success advising older adults in their search for the best retirement community suited to them in Lincoln, Omaha and surrounding areas, there are times when owner Mary Ann Stallings seeks advice to help grow her business.

When she does, she often turns to the experts at the Nebraska Business Development Center (NBDC) office in Lincoln, situated in the Entrepreneurship Center at Southeast Community College.

“She first came to us in 2010 when she started her business,” says Zack Zimmerman, associate director of the NBDC center in Lincoln. “I began working with her later when she wanted to locate her office to the incubator here. She is a vibrant business person with a great company and she has sought our advice on customer development, financial analysis, growth and how to make her business more sustainable. She’s really done well defining her vision, and we’ve worked with her on that, too.”

When it came time to hire her first employee, “we worked closely with her to identify the skills and traits she was looking for, and how to onboard

them and develop those skills,” Zimmerman says.

Bridge to Better Living works with senior adult clients and their families to guide them to a retirement community that fits their particular needs and preferences. The company’s service is at no cost to the senior client. This is enabled by the many contracts Bridge to better Living has with the retirement communities.

*We are not  
a computer  
program; we are  
people-to-people.*

work and provide the client with options. Our goal is to connect the client with the community best meeting their needs socially, physically, medically and financially.”

Her concern for older adults began when she was young and her grandparents were residents in a nursing home. It continued, she says, “because my

husband’s parents were older when he was born, and consequently our entire married life has involved the care of elderly parents, both his and mine. We were also the guardians for an aunt and uncle who depended on us for most of their care and important decisions.”

Finding the right communities to care for these loved ones “was always confusing and no matter how many times we did it, we found ourselves starting over,” she says.

Bridge to Better Living sprung from Stallings’ desire to help older adults by removing the guesswork, reducing the time, and providing tours and comprehensive information to enable clients to make confident choices.

“We help bridge the gap often occurring between family members making these difficult choices,” she says. “The fun part of my job is the relationship-building with clients, their families and the communities they have chosen.”



# LI-COR BIOSCIENCES INC



"LI-COR Bioscience Inc has a proven record of successful technology commercialization as well as advocacy for Nebraska economic development." — Marisol Rodriguez, NBDC

## 2014 INNOVATION BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

**F**rom a gas analyzer in an observatory on a mountaintop in Hawaii to technology that explores how cancer cells work, LI-COR Biosciences in Lincoln, Neb., develops products that are at the forefront of modern technology.

LI-COR Biosciences is a global leader in developing and marketing innovative, high quality instrument systems used in the fields of biological and environmental sciences, climatology, molecular biology and translational research.

During the past three years, LI-COR has collaborated with the Nebraska Business Development Center (NBDC) technology commercialization team by giving presentations at Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR)/Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) events, actively participating in the SBIR/STTR advisory board and by acting as an advocate for technology commercialization in the state. In addition, LI-COR's leadership has mentored other small businesses interested in technology commercialization and SBIR/STTR funding.

"We live by the idea that it takes a community to help build a company," says Senior Executive Vice President Greg Biggs, whose father, Bill, founded the company and serves as president and CEO. "The NBDC has been a resource for questions we don't have the answers to. We've utilized NBDC resources in a number of ways, from workshops and seminars to relationship-building."

LI-COR develops, designs, manufactures and distributes products to supplement an existing line of light sensors, gas analyzers and imaging systems. The company has six buildings on its 24-acre Superior Street campus and employs more than 330 people at the Lincoln headquarters and subsidiaries

in Bad Homburg, Germany and Cambridge, UK.

The company started in a machine shop in 1971 with Bill and Elaine Biggs and a part-time worker. In 1973, the four full-time employees and Bill Biggs moved into a rented building at 4630 Hartley Street while a new building was being built at LI-COR's current location at 44th and Superior Streets.

*We still work today to help the world feed people.*

"The genesis of our company began with my father working on a project with the university (of Nebraska) to utilize sorghum to solve food needs," Biggs says. "We still work today to help the world feed people."

In the early 1980's, LI-COR developed the first commercially viable Portable Photosynthesis System. For the first time, this allowed scientists to see simultaneous conductance and photosynthetic values in the field. Today, the successor to this instrument is now the most successful, most referenced photosynthesis system in the world.

The explosive growth in biotechnology research inspired LI COR's early endeavors into DNA sequencing technology. LI-COR developed a DNA sequencer that was instrumental in cataloguing the human genome. LI-COR's patented infrared dye technology incorporated into its biotechnology instruments is used worldwide for drug discovery and protein analysis.

LI-COR instruments, analysis software and reagents are used in more than 100 countries in

studies ranging from global climate change to cancer research.

"Impacting lives through science' has always been our driving focus," Biggs says. "It's very rewarding to see the technologies we invent move from research to clinical application."



The **Innovation Business of the Year** is awarded to a Nebraska business that advances technological innovation, partners with a Nebraska university to meet federal research and development needs, or increases commercialization of federal research.

2011—MultiMech Research & Development LLC  
2012—SectorNow LLC  
2013—LNKChemsolutions LLC  
2014—LI-COR Biosciences Inc

# KZCO INC



"KZCO has not only had impressive growth as a company but has contributed to the growth and expansion of their Nebraska-based suppliers."  
—Veronica Doga, NBDC



## 2014 MANUFACTURING BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

**S**ince introducing its first product in 1976, KZCO Inc. manufacturing company in Ashland, Neb., has derived success and loyalty by listening to its customers.

Scott Morgan, who serves as chief operating officer and chief financial officer, says KZCO has benefited from several programs offered by the Nebraska Business Development Center (NBDC). During the summer of 2013, the KZCO management team participated in a Lean Product Development class, and last fall, NBDC invited KZCO manufacturing to take part in the inaugural Intensive Entrepreneurship Program.

“That program really identified some new opportunities for us,” Morgan says. “It opened our eyes to finding leads and future business in ways we didn’t do yesterday.”

KZCO Inc. began in 1976 with one product, the Hydra-Halt, a device that replaced manual control valves on fertilizer applicators with a new hydraulic remote-controlled valve. Despite this innovation, Morgan says, some customers preferred to have an electric valve. All existing electric valves in the agriculture market were solenoid type, and less than reliable. KZCO then became the first in the agriculture industry to bring an economical motorized ball valve concept to market, introducing the Electra-Halt in 1982 after four years of research and development and excellent Hydra-Halt sales.

Over the next decade, KZCO introduced a wide variety of other agriculture and industrial products

including the Electra-Halt 2, along with expanding the Electra-Halt product line with new valve types, sizes, motors and wiring options. In 1997, Morgan says, the EH3 actuator and QC3 manifold valve were added, bringing the mathematical combination of available custom actuated valve options into the millions.

“What sets us apart,” Morgan says, “is our desire to listen to our customers, then design and develop new products to meet their needs.”

The company’s growth has been impressive. Over the last three years, sales have grown more than 50 percent, with both organic growth and sales in new markets, Morgan says.

In 2012, KZCO was awarded one of eight Global Innovation Awards from John Deere. This award was presented for updating KZCO’s most common electric actuated valve into an ISO-BUS-controlled electric valve. “This product sends and receives commands continuously to and from various parts of a John Deere sprayer and monitor system,” he says.

In November of 2014, after three years of product development, testing and validation, KZCO released a new line of products into the turf industry with the Toro Company being one of KZCO’s newest customers.

“KZCO has a professional management team, committed owners and board members, and now second-generation owners involved in the business, who all push for continual product development and sales,” Morgan says. “This has allowed us to keep growing over the years and to see a positive trend as we move forward. At times, we feel like a 40-year-old start up!”

*At times, we  
feel like a  
40-year-old  
start up!*



The **Manufacturing Business of the Year** is awarded to a Nebraska business that demonstrates leadership in employee involvement, continual process improvement, customer and supplier relations, innovation and new product development, sales growth, and sustainability.


2011—Overhead Door  
2012—Tri-V Tool & Manufacturing  
2013—Certified Transmission  
2014—KZCO Inc



# GRETNA SANITATION



## Sustainability—good for business and community



**G**retna Sanitation is dedicated to finding ways to reduce the amount of waste and recyclables that wind up in landfills, says company Vice President Andy Harpenau.

“Being a waste hauler gives us the ability to divert waste from the landfill to something much more useful such as composting,” Harpenau says. “Sure, it’s cheaper to mix and dump, but we’ve retained customers just because of the fact that we have higher diversion rates than other haulers.”

As landfills reach their capacity and shut down operations, waste haulers must look for alternative and possibly more distant sites which, when time and transportation costs are figured, results in higher costs passed on to their customers. “Gretna Sanitation believes that if people just recycled and composted more, it would make a world of difference,” says Jean Waters, energy and environmental engineer with the Nebraska Business Development Center (NBDC).

“Gretna Sanitation has established a composting site to reuse and recycle yard waste, turning it into high-value compost,” Waters says. “For the purposes of creating compost from yard waste, Gretna Sanitation does business as Soil Dynamics, successfully diverting 30,000 yards of manure, grass, leaves and wood waste from the landfill.”

Waters says NBDC worked with Gretna Sanitation to identify funding from the Nebraska Environmental Trust and the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality to be used to obtain equipment needed for the composting operation.

“In addition, we have connected Gretna

Sanitation with an innovative researcher from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln regarding a unique waste-to-energy project which also results in a high-quality compost soil amendment,” she says. “They truly believe in working with the community to find better ways of handling waste.”

*Composting is safer, cleaner and if run properly makes money, too.*

he says. “As their rates increase, people will start looking for alternatives.”

Composting is one of the most viable alternatives, Harpenau says. “It’s safer, cleaner and if run properly makes money, too,” he says. “We grind trees and sell mulch and yard waste compost. We’re really trying to make a difference.”

Gretna Sanitation is also experimenting with food-waste composting. They have started with a small plot because

neighbors initially expressed concerns about possible odors from the operation. Harpenau says his company will use the pilot-sized food waste operation to be a “proving ground” to help alleviate the neighbors’ apprehension.

Working with entities dedicated to sustainability such as the NBDC and P2RIC affords business people like Harpenau an opportunity to exchange useful information. “When you meet with like-minded individuals,” he says, “you always come away with good ideas.”



# MARK VII ENTERPRISES



"Santo has demonstrated a continued drive to expand his business while maintaining a standard of excellence, giving back to the community, and supporting veterans." — Mary Graff, NBDC

# 2014 GOVERNMENT CONTRACTOR OF THE YEAR

**M**ark Santo would love to tell everyone about his early construction work for the U.S. government, from the missile defense program buildings in the Marshall Islands to American embassy construction and renovations he helped oversee in Israel, China, Malaysia, Jamaica, Macedonia and the Cayman Islands.

But he can't, he says with a smile, because so much of the work was top secret.

And though he gained considerable knowledge and experience about how government contractors operate, when it came time to start his own general contracting business in his hometown of Omaha, Mark VII Enterprises, he sought out the experts at the Nebraska Business Development Center (NBDC).

"I was weighing my options in 2010," Santo recalls. "International work was too hot. American dollars going to big projects around the world had disappeared. I didn't choose to start as an entrepreneur, but I had to do something."

Santo saw an advertisement for a construction security technician at Offutt Air Force Base but wasn't sure if it was right for him, so he met with Andy Alexander of NBDC's procurement technical assistance program.

"He listened to what I wanted to accomplish and told me I was 100 percent entrepreneur," Santo recalls. "He showed me the step-by-step process of what I needed to do to position my company to do government contracting and how to use NBDC resources."

Santo started with small projects, acting as general contractor on public or military jobs that required

five or more specialty trades and the level of sophisticated project management he can provide. "I looked at projects other big contractors didn't want to take on," he says. "I knew it was a niche I could be competitive in."

His company is a City of Omaha Tier-I Small Business, Economically Disadvantaged Total Small Business, and Center of Veteran Enterprise verified Service Disabled Veteran Owned Small Business. A veteran of the U.S. Army National Guard, Santo has built his reputation by leveraging his past experience on government and military projects. He worked with Contractor Development Services Inc. to secure his first bid bond. Today, Mark VII has a bonding capacity of \$2.2 million.

*It only took us four years to go from zero to \$1 million in bonding capacity.*

"It only took us four years to go from zero to \$1 million in bonding capacity," he says, "and I anticipate that to go well beyond \$2.2 million this year."

Mary L. Graff, NBDC government contracting specialist, says Santo has also been active in the community as a volunteer, including his service on the City of Omaha Permits & Inspections Department Building Board of Review.

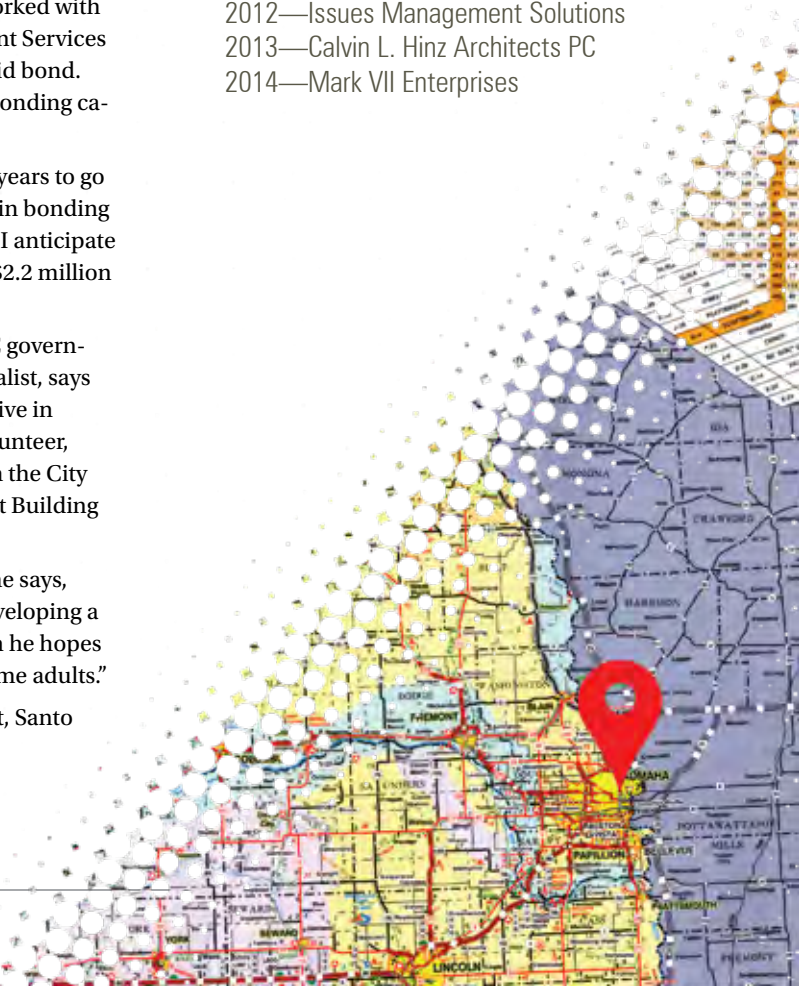
"He continues to develop his business," she says, "while also assisting his sister and wife in developing a woman-owned construction business, which he hopes to see his daughters operate when they became adults."

Success takes hard work and commitment, Santo says. And that's no secret.



The **Government Contractor of the Year** is awarded to a Nebraska business that is successful in selling and delivering products or services to federal, state or local government.

2011—Dyna-Tech Aviation Services  
2012—Issues Management Solutions  
2013—Calvin L. Hinz Architects PC  
2014—Mark VII Enterprises





"We're really fortunate in Nebraska to have a lot of programs available that help promote and grow businesses," Brehmer says. "The big thing is finding them. That's where NBDC's services come in very handy."

Founded in 1974 by Brehmer and his father, Reynard, Brehmer Manufacturing specializes in custom truck and hoist equipment as well as several other services that have helped the business expand into international markets.

"We started out in livestock equipment but we've always done a lot of custom building," says Brehmer, who purchased his father's interest in the company 15



Brehmer Manufacturing also provides design, manufacturing and customer services for Eagle International, the nation's leading provider of tire-recycling equipment. "We support nine different lines for them, from the tire pile to the grinders," Brehmer says. "We've gone into 27 different countries with their products. We're really big into recycling mining tires in Chile and South Africa."

*Opportunities are no longer limited by your location.*

He says opportunities are no longer limited by location. "We just spent six months

designing a new product communicating via Skype with a company in Australia," he says.

Held, NBDC's consultant, recently referred an inventor to work with Brehmer Manufacturing and the Nebraska Department of Economic Development in an innovation prototype grant program.

"She knows what we're doing up here and that helps," Brehmer says. "Working with NBDC is a good partnership; no doubt about it."



## Diversification and niche markets are secret to survival

**J**oe Brehmer, president and owner of Brehmer Manufacturing Inc. in Lyons, Neb., recalls the first time he became involved with the Nebraska Business Development Center.

"It was back in about 2000," he says. "Renee (Held) pulled together a group of non-competing manufacturers. I think there were six of us, and the subject was Lean Manufacturing."

A 20-year member of the NBDC staff at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, Held is a NIST-MEP Lean-certified consultant.

"I really enjoyed that experience," Brehmer says. "I liked learning about Lean Manufacturing and being able to meet others like myself."

Brehmer Manufacturing and NBDC have stayed in contact ever since, hosting on-site Lean consulting, leadership training and, most recently, participating in the Intensive Entrepreneurship Program.

years ago. "That's what dad and I liked to do."

They began the business in Oakland, Neb., and in 1983 moved to a building in Lyons. "We've since expanded seven times," Brehmer says. "We started with 19,000 square feet and we're up to 49,540 square feet and planning another expansion. Seems like whenever we get done with one we start another."

The company employs 64 people "and we could use another four or five," he says.

Being diversified has helped Brehmer Manufacturing survive at times when many markets were slumping. "The difference between us and others is that we like niche markets where we can do the design and manufacturing," he says.

For example, Brehmer Manufacturing designs and manufactures new products and alterations in current products for the A.J. O'Mara Group in South Dakota.



BREHMER MANUFACTURING

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