

**NEBRASKA BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CENTER**



## DEAR FRIENDS OF NBDC

**T**he Nebraska Business Development Center (NBDC) has a long and successful history of providing vital business services across Nebraska to our clients at every stage of their business process. As we celebrate 37 years of Dr. Robert Bernier's service to NBDC, this is a mission that will not change. Bob has established a program of excellence. We thank him for his dedication and look forward to building on his legacy.

Small businesses comprise 95% of the business establishments in Nebraska and employ nearly 30% of its private sector workforce. They are the backbone of successful communities across our state. Business owners invest time and treasure to build their enterprises and employ our citizens in meaningful jobs. They support not only families and communities in our state, but also contribute to the nation's wealth and security.

In 2016, NBDC assisted 2,187 Nebraska businesses. Our clients created 1,086 jobs, invested \$66,493,177 in their operations and increased sales, including government contracts, by \$170,821,693. The total economic impact of NBDC on the state last year was \$398.9 million.

The key to NBDC's success is the excellence of its consultants. Every day they work throughout the state to help clients start and grow successful businesses. We are proud of these highly qualified professionals. Their specialized services include: packaging and placing commercial loans, including SBA guaranteed loans; qualifying for and submitting proposals for government contracts; identifying customer leads, including for international sales; improving process flow in both manufacturing and service businesses; and commercializing innovative products.

NBDC is a department of the College of Business Administration at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. UNO operates NBDC offices in Omaha, and Scottsbluff. In 2016, NBDC funded higher education institutions to operate other offices: Southeast Community College in Lincoln, University of Nebraska at Kearney in Kearney and Grand Island, Wayne State College in Wayne, Mid-Plains Community College in North Platte and McCook and Chadron State College in Chadron.

The services of NBDC are not possible without funding from the University of Nebraska at Omaha, the U.S. Small Business Administration, the Defense Logistics Agency, the Environmental Protection Agency, and First National Bank of Omaha.

The 2016 Annual Report showcases 12 Nebraska businesses that represent the quality and vitality of our clients and the entrepreneurial spirit of Nebraska. We are proud to recognize them.

As the new State Director for NBDC, I join Dean Pol, the new Deputy State Director Jean Waters and the NBDC consultants in standing ready to support the growth and success of Nebraska businesses. We are excited to see what the future holds for NBDC, the University and the state.

## OUR PARTNERS



Catherine Lang, JD  
State Director  
Assistant Dean



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

# 2016 NBDC IMPACT ON NEBRASKA



## CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT 1

Jobs-378

Investment-\$12,064,404

## CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT 2

Jobs-323

Investment-\$25,556,028

## CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT 3

Jobs-385

Investment-\$28,872,745



**Jobs created and saved**

**1,086**



**Increased sales**

**\$41,056,853**



**Investment by businesses**

**\$66,493,177**



**Government contracts**

**\$129,764,840**



**Operational savings**

**\$4,129,943**



**Clients Served**

**2,187**



**\$398.9 MILLION**

**Total impact to  
Nebraska's economy<sup>1</sup>**

NBDC programs include the Small Business Development Centers, the Procurement Technical Assistance program, the Pollution Prevention Resource Information Center, Technology Commercialization, and Professional and Organizational Development. Funding is received from the U.S. Small Business Administration, the Defense Logistics Agency (U.S. Department of Defense), the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and the State of Nebraska.



## BEYOND THE NUMBERS

NBDC's impact can be seen in the successes of its clients across the state. Read their stories in the following pages.

<sup>1</sup>Total state-wide economic impact includes direct, indirect, and induced impact as calculated using the IMPLAN economic model



Photo left: Bernier and Julie Totten, UNO vice chancellor (ret.). Above: Bernier and Chuck Schroeder, executive director of the Nebraska Rural Futures Institute

## Bernier retires – stepping down but not away

**A**fter nearly four decades as the Nebraska Business Development Center (NBDC) State Director, Robert Bernier, Ph.D., is retiring. For him, that means cutting back to two days a week. With all the time, guidance and dedication he has invested here, he just can't walk away.

His NBDC career began in 1979. While serving as assistant director of University Relations at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO), Bernier was asked to take on the post of director when NBDC was just two years old.

Bernier was no stranger to the organization or its mission. While earning an MBA from UNO, he had worked on Small Business Institute program cases. With guidance, graduate students wrote feasibility studies and business plans, as well as conducted market research for clients recruited

by the university or referred by the Small Business Administration (SBA).

While completing the MBA capstone course, Bernier participated in the second Rural Communities Program. He spent 10 days in Aurora, Neb., producing a strategic analysis for the local newspaper. It was a natural pairing for him, having been employed as a reporter in Ohio before recruitment by UNO Chancellor Ronald Roskens.

Bernier epitomizes the qualities that define leadership. He guided NBDC throughout its evolution, from a contract program to a grant program after passage of the Small Business Development Center Act of 1980. He led NBDC when funds from the first cooperative agreement provided the money to establish fulltime offices. He helped grow NBDC from a staff consisting of himself, Assistant Director Sterling Kent and four part-time student workers into today's

highly experienced team of consultants, business experts and support staff in offices across the state. He shepherded NBDC through budget crises that threatened its future.

"When (then Dean) Larry Trussell asked me to take this job, I felt blessed," Bernier recalls. "I grew up in a small business. My dad was a home builder. This job was going to allow me to take academic learning and apply it for the benefit of small business owners. It was my dream job. I never thought there was such a job, and three years earlier, there wasn't. I never wanted to do anything else."

College of Business Administration Dean Louis Pol says Bernier's impact on NBDC, the university and the state "has been incredible."

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*"He is responsible for so many things that have made us better," Pol says. "He never stopped generating good ideas – finding another service or another funding source. It made him an exemplary leader."*

Of all the aspects of the organization he has worked hard to shape, Bernier feels his greatest

accomplishment lies in NBDC's people. "Rather than a government program that delivers the basics in business assistance, I tried to create a team of professionally competent consultants," he says, "a team that could be compared to what you would find at a well-respected law firm or accounting firm, where clients receive the best advice that is available."

Bernier says he hired people with advanced degrees and empowered them to obtain the training they needed to do the best job possible. "Over the years, we have developed an incredible cadre of people with knowledge in specific areas," he says. "These specializations really impact our clients. When business owners come here, they're getting services and advice they couldn't find anywhere else. That was my vision."

Through the years, Bernier has made certain NBDC retains its academic focus. "We are one of the few university entities that use graduate assistants to engage with clients one-on-one," he says. "I believe they greatly benefit from that experience." He directly supports business education through the Robert E. Bernier Scholarship for graduate assistants.

As an administrator, Bernier missed being able to take part in hands-on projects, where he could work with a small business client. Now that he has more time, he's rolling up his sleeves and serving as an NBDC consultant. Eight hours a week, he will help technology startups work toward commercialization. He also plans to write a blog on small business development. "And, I'm going to study Sherlock Holmes," he says. Long fascinated by the fictional detective, Bernier is active in a monthly study group and attends conferences on the subject.

Asked about his legacy, he smiles. "For NBDC to continue to provide the kind of expert business assistance it has been for so long," he answers. "On a more personal level, that people who work here as graduate assistants will take what they learn and benefit from it in their careers."

Much like Bernier has done for the past 37 years. ■

**Business Plan Loan Packaging Capital Access Market Research Tech Commercialization Exporting**



INGRID BATTERSHELL



GARY DUSEK



SARA BENNETT



ZACK ZIMMERMAN



WEI JING



JOSH NICHOL-CADDY

**Succession Planning Financial Projections Business Valuation**

**Sustainability Training**



CHARLIE MCPHERSON



ARETHA BOEX



ODEE INGERSOLL



LOREN KUCERA



RICK YODER



JEAN WATERS  
DEPUTY STATE DIRECTOR

**Government Contracting BidMatching Subcontracting Registering Market Research**



VERONICA DOGA



MARY GRAFF



CHUCK BECK



ROGER JOHNSON



ROGER MCCULLOUGH



DICK UHING



QUENTIN FARLEY

**Process Improvement Leadership Development Project Management Supply Chain Management Safety Leadership**



RENEE HELD



HAROLD SARGUS



BETH GIESBRECHT



KIM HARTER



LAURIE MATTHEWS



JERRY PARRIOTT  
BUSINESS MANAGER

## INTENSIVE BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT PROJECT FOR DAWSON COUNTY



### Retailers benefit from week-long program

**T**he population of Lexington, Nebraska is a unique mix of cultures reflected in a vibrant downtown, active with Anglo, Latino, and Somalian businesses and shoppers. This setting provided an exceptional opportunity for NBDC to conduct a week-long intensive consulting project focusing on minority-owned businesses. Project objectives were to provide confidential management and marketing consulting to the businesses, recommendations for downtown promotions to the city, chamber, and economic development corporation, and to be a model for future NBDC outreach.

In addition to operational recommendations to the individual businesses, the project resulted in brighter storefronts and improved communication between small business owners in

downtown Lexington, officials there say.

Regular networking events and more attention to storefront displays were among the recommendations made to nine small businesses by the team of NBDC consultants from across the state who traveled to Lexington to participate in the project.

“In January, we approached the businesses that were involved in the November project and asked if they would participate in a similar event,” says Lexington Mayor John Fagot. “Eight of the nine said yes, they would go through it again and would recommend it to other business owners.”

The NBDC team also recommended the city, the Lexington Area Chamber of Commerce and the Dawson Area Development work together and with the businesses to create an annual event to encourage residents to patronize downtown stores, many of which are owned or operated by minorities, including Latino and Somali immigrants. The team suggested this event be held in the summer so that sidewalk sales can be a part of it.

Mayor Fagot says planning is underway for such an

### BUSINESSES

#### **Clothing Food Market**

General store targeting Hispanic clients

#### **Taqueria y Torteria Max**

Mexican restaurant

#### **Fascinacion**

Shoes, women’s fashions and party planning

#### **Casa Vasquez**

Men’s western clothing

#### **Wardheer Halal Market**

Soft-goods merchandise and restaurant

#### **Mac’s Creek Winery & Vineyard**

Winery and tasting room

#### **La Bamba**

Clothing, furniture and hard goods

#### **African International**

Food, clothing and restaurant

#### **Luna’s Botanica**

Aromatics and perfume



From left: Charlie McPherson, NBDC; Christy Werger, Lexington Area Chamber of Commerce; Max Avalos and Norma Avalos, owners Taqueria Max; Ingrid Battershell, NBDC; Catherine Lang, NBDC state director; Cinthya Duenas, Catholic Charities | Two of the many retail businesses in Lexington serving the city's African and Hispanic populations.

event. Rather than a “sidewalk days” sort of event, he says organizers foresee a theme designed to raise the curiosity of local residents. “We want to do something to promote people coming downtown and going into the stores to see what these businesses have to offer, not stop on the sidewalk and stay outside,” he says. “I know from visiting these stores that when they walk in, they’ll find things they can use.”

The NBDC consultants also recommended the formation of a business coalition that would hold a regular gathering such as a breakfast meeting. Christy Werger, executive director of the Lexington Area Chamber of Commerce, says that beginning in March, a coffee get-together will be held at a different downtown business each month.

“We see it as an opportunity not only for increased networking but also a chance for the owners to really get to know each other and express their needs to each other and to the city, the chamber and the development corporation,” she says.

The project began with a Sunday welcome dinner at which the business owners met with their designated NBDC consultant. Spanish-language translators were available for each Hispanic business.

On Monday morning, NBDC consultants visited their assigned businesses. The initial visit focused on

the business model for each client. NBDC’s version of the Lean Business Canvas was used to guide the development of the business model. The purpose of this consultation was to help the owners express the vision for their businesses and to help consultants understand that vision.

Once the business model was understood, the consultant helped the business owner identify the important needs from a strategic perspective. These needs generally included reviews of:

- Operation processes
- Customer service processes
- Human resource practices
- Markets and marketing strategies
- Financial operations
- Merchandising techniques

“It took a little bit of time to overcome the initial apprehension of having someone come into your business and evaluate what you do, especially for those business owners who spoke little or no English,” says Jennifer McKeone, executive director of the Dawson Area Development Corporation. “Once the consultants built trust with their respective clients, it went very well.”

Abby Brecks, Dawson Area Development Corporation marketing coordinator, revisited the

businesses along with Werger and Dora Vivas, member of the Lexington City Council. “For the most part, the owners felt the consultants were great and that it was a very positive project,” Brecks says.

In accordance with objectives of the U.S. Small Business Administration, which funded the project, efforts were focused on businesses owned by Hispanic and African-American individuals.

At the conclusion of the project, the businesses received a confidential report that included a description of their business model, assessments of their operations and marketing and merchandising (including analysis of the cost of goods sold in comparison to prices charged) and pro forma financials. ■

## CONSULTANTS

Robert E. Bernier, NBDC state director; Jean Waters, NBDC deputy state director; NBDC consultants Josh Nichol-Caddy, Aretha Boex, Ingrid Battershell, Charlie McPherson, Odee Ingersoll, Renee Held, and Sara Bennett; Nancy Flock, loan specialist in North Platte for the Rural Enterprise Assistance Project, a program of the Center for Rural Affairs; Cinthya Duenaf, counselor with the Juan Diego Center, a part of Catholic Charities in Omaha; and Mary Bernier, independent consultant.





# Unique food product attracts government funding

**B**ugeater Foods has tapped into an old name to mine new interest in crickets as a protein additive to human foods.

When the company needed research and guidance for its application for a Phase I Small Business Innovation research (SBIR) grant from the National Institute of Foods and Agriculture, a department of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), it called upon the Nebraska Business Development Center (NBDC) and its technology commercialization team.

Founded in 2015 by Kelly Sturek, Julianne Kopf and Alec Wiese, all former students at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Bugeater Foods takes its name from that of the university's original football team.

The company's first product was a protein shake called — appropriately, considering the cricket additive — Jump. Most recently, the trio has been working on using cricket powder as an additive to pasta and rice products.

In 2016, the director of NBDC's technology commercialization program, Wei Jing, provided expertise as Bugeater assembled its application for the USDA grant. Ultimately, the company was awarded \$100,000 to develop crickets as safe, healthful staple food products and to refine their taste.

The Nebraska Department of Economic Development partially matched the grant with an additional \$65,000.

Participation in the Lincoln accelerator program NMotion brought a \$20,000 investment in exchange for some equity in the company. Sturek, who serves as Bugeater's CEO, and his partners also invested funds they had won in business plan competitions. He hopes the company will eventually obtain a



Phase II grant and an additional \$600,000 to develop and manufacture commercial-ready products.

"Wei has been very helpful as we proceed," he says. "When we put together our commercialization plan, we needed the numbers and data she has been able to provide. She has also assembled market research reports on insect-based products, and it's nice to have a strong sense of the history and the other players in the market."

Sturek studied entrepreneurship at UNL and gained knowledge in business development with a focus on sales, marketing, team leadership and fundraising. Kopf, who serves as the COO as well as the company's food scientist, works at the UNL Food Innovation Center. Wiese studied economics at UNL and handles the company's website as well as product packaging and marketing materials.

Jing lauds Bugeater Foods for incorporating environmental sustainability as a strategic business value. "They do this by adding a product into the human food chain that reduces the energy intensiveness of current protein production and provides a less expensive protein source available for production in any climate," she says.

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"Bugeater Foods is a great example of the many companies developing new products and technologies here in Nebraska."

Sturek says NBDC is a valuable resource for new and innovative companies like his. "As a startup, it's great to get help in the form of market research reports or to have someone who is experienced leading you through the steps of federal grant applications," he says. "That gives us the time to do the other things we need to do to be successful." ■





## Business considers NBDC consultant a “lifesaver”

Long before they shredded their first sheet of paper, John Schlothauer and Douglas Koob contacted Ingrid Battershell, director of the Nebraska Business Development Center (NBDC) office in Scottsbluff.

It was 2009, and the two men had the idea of opening their own document shredding service in Gering. At the time, shredding for area businesses was done by a company in North Platte. The two men visited with area business owners and determined they had the support they needed to succeed.

They also needed help with a business plan to obtain a loan and purchase a shredding truck, so they visited with Battershell. She helped them by preparing the cash flow projections and pro forma financials they needed. They started their company, Docu-Shred with one truck and one shredding day.

In 2010, they acquired a contract with the local hospital and returned to NBDC’s office to obtain the cash flow projections necessary for a loan to buy a second truck. As the business continued to grow, they also purchased a skid steer, paper baler and cardboard baler, and built a 3,600-square-foot warehouse.

In 2013, Schlothauer and Koob worked with Battershell on cash flow projections on the feasibility of purchasing a FedEx ground route in Cheyenne County, Neb. After starting with one truck and one employee, the men have added seven routes in Nebraska and Wyoming.

Last year, Battershell provided assistance in setting up Quick Books accounting for the men’s businesses. She also provided cash flow projections for Schlothauer when he invested in a Gering tavern,



From left: John Schlothauer and Douglas Koob

the Rompus Room.

“Ingrid has been a lifesaver for us,” Schlothauer says. “She helped us understand things and she always looks at the big picture. There is so much involved with starting a business, and she is always there to remind us of things we couldn’t afford to forget. The most valuable help we’ve had was Ingrid.”

He says NBDC’s office in Scottsbluff is a resource for the entire region. “Anybody I talk to who’s thinking about starting a business, I tell them the first place you need to go is to see Ingrid.”

As a service to the community, Docu-Shred hosts free shredding days for individuals with small boxes of confidential documents they want destroyed.

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“John and Doug are true entrepreneurs,” Battershell says. “They devote full time to their businesses and are always looking for other opportunities to invest.”

Schlothauer says he and his business partners keep in contact with Battershell. “We stay in touch because we enjoy working with her so much,” he says. “Plus, we’re not done doing what we want to do.” ■

JACOBI'S CARPET ONE FLOOR & HOME



Tim Jacobi

# Company benefits from “fresh set of eyes”

Assistance from the Nebraska Business Development Center (NBDC) office in Grand Island has enabled Jacobi Carpet One Floor & Home to refinance existing debt and provide additional working capital for the business.

The company was founded 45 years ago in downtown Hastings by H. Edward Jacobi, whose son, Tim, now serves as its president. Tim’s wife, Jody, is the vice president. The company, which also has a retail showroom in Kearney, provides flooring products, window coverings and professional installation throughout central Nebraska and into northern Kansas.

Jody Jacobi says the company began working with NBDC consultant Sara Bennett in late 2015. “We connected with her through a bank and she talked us through all that needed to be done and what she could help us with,” Jody says.

Bennett worked with the Jacobi’s to determine the best loan structure to minimize fees and improve cash flow. She served as an advocate when the Jacobi’s experienced a number of frustrating obstacles and months-long delays from the first bank they approached. Bennett also helped them navigate the requirements to obtain a Small Business Administration (SBA) guarantee for the loan.

“There was so much work involved and she was very, very helpful,” Jody Jacobi says. “Every time we faced another delay or another hurdle was thrown our way, she was so encouraging.”

Ultimately, the Jacobi’s took the loan package Bennett had prepared to another area bank.

“Sara was so good getting everything we needed in place, in 10 days we had a loan,” Jody says. “They didn’t even need the SBA guarantee. It was all so well put together the banker didn’t have any questions about anything.”

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*Bennett’s experience “was huge for us,” Jody says. “She made us much more aware of the level of detail the bank wants to see. She made a huge difference getting us to where we are today.”*

Tim Jacobi is very active in the flooring industry, serving as a leader for change and innovation. He is a board member of the World Floor Covering

Association and a member of the organization’s education committee. He is a charter member and past president of the Nebraska-Iowa Floor Covering Association, a past member of the advisory council for Carpet One, and served more than a decade as chairman of the Great Plains Regional Network Group of Carpet One.

Jacobi Carpet One Floor & Home is generous to the communities it serves. Tim Jacobi has volunteered on the boards of numerous civic and charitable organizations. The company donates inventory to the Habitat for Humanity Restore in Grand Island; flooring for halfway houses for Revive Incorporated in Hastings; flooring for projects in Hastings Catholic schools; and gift certificates for flooring to the area Catholic and Lutheran schools’ annual galas and to Remodel for Kids, the annual Big Brothers/Big Sisters fundraiser, and many other benefits and fundraisers.

Tim says he considers Bennett and NBDC a “tremendous resource” for the region’s small businesses. “Had we known five or 10 years ago that kind of help was there for us, our business could have been different,” he says. “It’s like having a fresh set of eyes looking in from 10,000 feet when you have your nose to it every day.” ■





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From left: Cory Ditter and Darin Ditter

**DISTAR INDUSTRIES**



NEBRASKA BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CENTER

# Custom fabrication company sees success with state-of-the-art technology and equipment

**D**arin Ditter was a partner at a design and fabricating business in Columbus and his brother, Cory, was the sales manager when they approached Loren Kucera, consultant at the Nebraska Business Development Center office at Wayne State College.

“We had met Loren the previous year, when the state conducted a tour of our plant,” Darin Ditter recalls. “Also, a good friend of ours who owns a different business recommended him.”

The brothers originally intended to purchase the design business from the other partner and sought Kucera’s expertise.

“When we first started talking to Loren, we wanted to work on a business plan and financial structure so we could present it to a bank to obtain financing to acquire the other half of the business we were at,” Ditter says. “But, instead of purchasing the other owner’s share, we ended up selling my half to him. That’s when we decided to start our own company.”

Once the sale of his share was complete, the Ditter brothers began planning their own business, DiStar Industries again enlisting Kucera’s assistance and advice.

“At that point, I started to work with Darin and Cory on a business plan with financial projections,” Kucera says. “Initially, I brought several financing agencies to the table and, along with a bank, we were able to assemble a financial package to start DiStar Industries. In February 2015, four different agencies plus a commercial bank approved loans. Counting their own capital injection, the total project cost exceeded \$2 million.”

Today, DiStar Industries provides quality service and products to the medical, food service, commercial construction, agriculture, transportation and manufacturing industries. Ditter says he and his brother have invested in technology and modern, productive equipment to perform multiple operations and provide turnkey solutions.

In the summer of 2016, the brothers contacted NBDC again. “Their business had grown so rapidly they needed to double their building to accommodate their employees and increase efficiencies in their operation,” Kucera says.

DiStar Industries currently employs nine people. “We are highly skilled at custom fabrication,” Cory Ditter says. “Really there’s nothing we can’t tackle. Thankfully, there is a lot going on in Columbus. Though we sell nationwide, I’d say 75 percent of our business comes from a 100-mile radius.”

Many of their customers are also longtime friends, Darin Ditter says. “They know us and know our work because we’ve been in this business close

to 20 years, including the first company we were at,” he says.

Cory Ditter says he and his brother “are blessed” to be part of a tight-knit community with so many resources, including Kucera and NBDC.

“When you start your own business, there are always questions and things you don’t understand,” he says.

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“Loren had the answers and always got back to us without delay. We were fortunate enough to have orders and commitments even before we opened our doors, so we had to meet a very tight schedule. Loren was instrumental in making that happen.”







# NBDC helps medical business from startup to expansion

Trent Kleinow, co-owner of Priority Medical Transport in North Platte, says Nebraska Business Development Center (NBDC) consultant Charlie McPherson “was instrumental” in getting the inter-facility medical transportation service launched.

Kleinow opened the business with his brother, Trev, in November, 2015 after nearly two years laying the groundwork. “In the beginning, we weren’t sure how to start building a business plan,” Trent Kleinow says. “Charlie helped figure out exactly what data we needed. We compiled it and took it back to him, and he built the plan for us.” He says the results were impressive.

“We had more favorable comments on that business plan from the bank and investors than we had imagined,” he says.

“They were really impressed with the work that went into it.”

The brothers joined with Jim Smith, M.D., and began Priority Medical Transport with two ambulances and 14 staff members, including paramedics, nurses and Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs). They have since expanded to four ambulances and 34 staffers, 20 of whom are fulltime. “We thought we’d handle 40 calls a month and we have been averaging 85,” Kleinow says. They are expanding the business into the Kearney area.

Trent Kleinow began his Emergency Medical Services (EMS) career with the North Platte Fire Department (NPFDD) in 1999 while obtaining an EMT license through Mid-Plains Community College. In 2000, he advanced to the EMT-Intermediate level



and obtained a hazardous materials technician certification through Texas A&M University. He has moved through the ranks at NPFDD with promotions to Fire Captain in 2011 and to Assistant Fire Chief in 2013. He currently oversees daily operations as well as fire, hazmat and EMS training.

Trev Kleinow is a nationally registered paramedic who began as a hazmat technician. He obtained his EMT license with the state of Nebraska and national registry in 2006. He went on to obtain his paramedic license from the Accelerated Paramedic Program in McCook. He has held the position of paramedic ER

Tech at Great Plains Health Emergency Department and transport medic and 9-1-1 medic for Regional West Garden County Hospital.

Dr. Smith has been board certified by the American Board of Emergency Medicine since 1992. He has served as president of the Nebraska chapter of the American College of Emergency Physicians and in 2006 was appointed by the governor to the Nebraska State EMS Board, where he serves as board chairman.

Trent Kleinow says NBDC and McPherson have been reliable sources of detailed guidance for his business. “With Charlie, we weren’t wasting our time on things we didn’t need to do,” he says. “He knew precisely what he needed to help build our plan and we got it to him. There is no way we could have put together that extensive a plan without him.”

He says McPherson has been “a great asset for us, and for others. There’s a local gym owner who wanted to expand his business and asked how we got our plan put together, so we sent him Charlie’s way. I would definitely recommend him and NBDC to anyone just starting out or needing help with their business.” ■

From left: Kerri Kleinow, Trev Kleinow, Paula Kleinow, Trent Kleinow, Glee Smith, Dr. Jim Smith

## AMERICAN PREMIUM FOODS



Sam Absy

# NBDC helps food exporter explore new opportunities

**S**am Absy, owner of American Premium Foods in Omaha, says he relies upon the Nebraska Business Development Center (NBDC) and Josh Nichol-Caddy, export consultant and market research analyst, “to keep our eyes open to opportunities that will help our business.”

American Premium Foods was launched in February 2014 as an international wholesaler and exporter of primarily “halal” processed meats to markets in the Middle East and Southeast Asia nations. Halal is an Arabic term which means permissible according to Islamic law. In reference to food, it is the Islamic dietary standard. Meat is the most strictly regulated of the food groups. The most common example of forbidden (or haram) food is pork. While pork is the only meat that cannot be consumed by Muslims, other foods not in a state of purity are also considered forbidden. The criteria for acceptable non-pork items include their source, the method of the animal’s death and how it was processed.

American Premium Foods sells halal products such as beef bacon, turkey bacon and deli products. “We partner with processing plants, most of which are situated in Nebraska, to produce our products from our recipes,” Absy says. “We currently export to seven countries where our products are served by restaurants, catering companies and hotels, and sold in some supermarket chains.”

Nichol-Caddy provided international market research in preparation for the company’s participation in Gulfood, an annual food exposition that attracts 90,000 buyers to the Dubai World Trade center. He conducted the market research through the State Trade Expansion Program (STEP), funded in part through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA). STEP funds are awarded by the SBA and, in Nebraska, applied for and administered by the state’s Department of Economic Development.

In addition, Nichol-Caddy has offered advice as American Premium Foods continues to seek

additional contacts in the region, as well as information about how the company could expand its product offerings.

Absy, who in 2006 came from Palestine to Omaha to attend college and found the city a good environment to start a business, says he partners with other longtime exporters and prefers to use Nebraska meat processors when he can.

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“Nebraska meat processors offer superior products that have been well received by my customers,” he says.

He says Nichol-Caddy and NBDC have been very useful answering questions and offering guidance. “Josh has been helping throughout the business,” Absy says. “He tells us about local events and workshops, and he supplies market research. He did a pretty nice report for us about the market and the Middle East. He also passes on information about other organizations that work with exporters to expand their businesses.”

He says Nichol-Caddy regularly sends information detailing shows and events geared toward exporters. “Some we already know about, but most we don’t,” Absy says. “He keeps our eyes open.” Absy says accurate information and reliable research is instrumental in growing a business in an extremely competitive and seasonal market such as his.

“It’s good to know what’s going on out there,” he says, “and Josh continuously helps us add information to the pool.” ■



Gulfood, an annual food exposition at the Dubai World Trade Center

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“Cody and Chrystal are not only successful in their business, they work hard to share that success with others by promoting the farmers and ranchers they serve.”



## CHAMPION OF SMALL BUSINESS

**B**uilding a business and supporting their community go hand-in-hand for Cody and Chrystal Brooks, owners of White River Feed in Chadron.

“Cody and Chrystal are not only successful in their business, they work hard to share that success with others by promoting the farmers and ranchers they serve,” says Gary Dusek, head business consultant at the Nebraska Business Development Center (NBDC) office in Chadron. “They are active in charitable and civic events, and they help their customers with the most up-to-date information, advice and products.”

White River Feed is a member of the Chadron Chamber of Commerce. Cody is a member of the county fair board, and Chrystal is a member of the local Kiwanis, Chadron Chamber of Commerce Board, and Chadron Chamber Ambassadors. She also serves as secretary for the Chadron Youth Baseball Board.

“Through the Kiwanis, Cody and Chrystal are helping other businesses get involved in a family-friendly way by organizing and participating in the annual Halloween Trunk or Treat event on Main Street,” Dusek says.

The company’s relationship with NBDC began when Cody Brooks and his business partner needed a written business plan to purchase White River Feed & Trailer Sales which led them to Tim

Donahue, former director of the NBDC office in Chadron. Brooks’ business partner at the time, Craig Hoffman, was working for the company. Brooks had worked for the company for 12 years but had left the previous fall on good terms with the owners.

“We wound up with a good, solid business plan,” Brooks says. “It got us the loan.”

Donahue also helped the two men obtain a loan and a line of credit at Security First Bank in Chadron. NBDC consultant and student worker Andrew Borgialli assisted Brooks and Hoffman by writing a draft of the business plan and providing a projected 12-month cash flow based on the tax documents shared by the previous owners. The NBDC office also provided 12-month projected sales forecast, a 12-month projected profit and loss and a projected income statement for 2013–2015.

Brooks says the business plan continued to prove useful long after securing the loan. “We kept referring back to it,” he says. “It gave us a three-year plan that served as a way to gauge our progress and where we needed to be.”

They changed the name of the business to White River Feed after discontinuing the trailer sales. Also, Cody and Chrystal have since purchased Hoffman’s share of the business.

White River Feed, which has five employees, has increased sales every year since 2012. In addition, Brooks worked with the NBDC Procurement Technical Assistance program and consultants Mary Graff and Chuck Beck to secure three government

contracting awards in 2015.

The business offers a variety of farm and ranch supplies along with feed and seed. They sell agrichemicals, herbicides, pesticides, steel panels and gates, steel cattle feeders, steel feed bunks, wood and steel fence posts and electric fence supplies. They carry Ritchie waterers and also provide tack and horse care supplies.

Brooks says the NBDC office in Chadron has been a reliable resource for his company. “They are very knowledgeable and worked well with us,” he says. “They really helped us get going.

“For a young person, or for anyone just starting out in business, they’re a good resource to have, and they’re right here in our home town,” he says. “I’d darn sure recommend them to anybody who needs business advice and assistance.” ■

### CHAMPION OF SMALL BUSINESS AWARD

has been presented annually since 1983 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. For all past awards visit [nbdc.unomaha.edu/about/champions](http://nbdc.unomaha.edu/about/champions).

2012 – Jim and Tim Schneider, S&S Plumbing

2013 – Douglas Garwood, Garwood Enterprises

2014 – Roger Franklin, Gary’s Cleaning and Restoration

2015 – Christine and Kevin Grooms, American Agricultural Laboratory

2016 – Cody and Chrystal Brooks, White River Feed LLC



From left: Jennifer Wittrock, NBDC; Trevor Kahl, Tyler Kane, Cody Brooks, Chrystal Brooks, and Taylor Wild, White River Feed; Gary Dusek, NBDC

# PRAIRIE VIEW INDUSTRIES



# GOVERNMENT CONTRACTOR OF THE YEAR

**P**rairie View Industries in Fairbury, a leading U.S. manufacturer of multifold aluminum wheelchair ramps and modular ramp systems as well as a designer of food service equipment, began working with the Nebraska Business Development Center (NBDC) in 2012.

Roger McCullough, NBDC Procurement Technical Assistance program consultant, assisted the company with migrating its Central Contracting Registration (CCR) to the government's System for Award Management (SAM). He also helped establish a BidMatch profile that enables Prairie View Industries to receive notifications of open federal and state contract solicitations. The company receives an average of 10 notifications each day.

"Since then, NBDC has maintained a working relationship with the company to make certain the SAM registration is up to date, the BidMatch profile is current and accurate, and that the leadership understands the solicitations that are sent to them," McCullough says.

The company's use of that assistance has played a significant role as Prairie View Industries earns 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.

2012 - Issues Management Solutions

2013 - Calvin L. Hinz Architects PC

2014 - Mark VII Enterprises

2015 - Farris Engineering

2016 - Prairie View Industries

honor of 2016 Government Contractor of the Year.

Prairie View Industries' Vice President of Sales John Waldrep says the company does considerable business with the U.S. Veteran's Administration.

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"There are so many hoops to jump through in order to do business with the government," he says. "We can't afford to hire the kind of person we would need to do that, so we are grateful we've had Roger on our side to help walk us through that process."

The company was founded by Richard Allen in Prairie View, Kan., in 1991. It has since relocated to Fairbury, where it occupies a 135,000-square-foot facility. It manufactures portable wheelchair ramps, recreational products, organizational shelves, pet ramps and food service equipment, including wheeled racks for a variety of uses. It also fabricates custom food service equipment and complete commercial kitchens.

In 2007, Prairie View Industries began selling products to the Department of Veteran Affairs. The company's government sales have increased in recent years. Most recently, the company was awarded a five-year Multiple Award Schedule (MAS) contract under the Federal Supply Schedule 65IIF for Patient Mobility Devices.

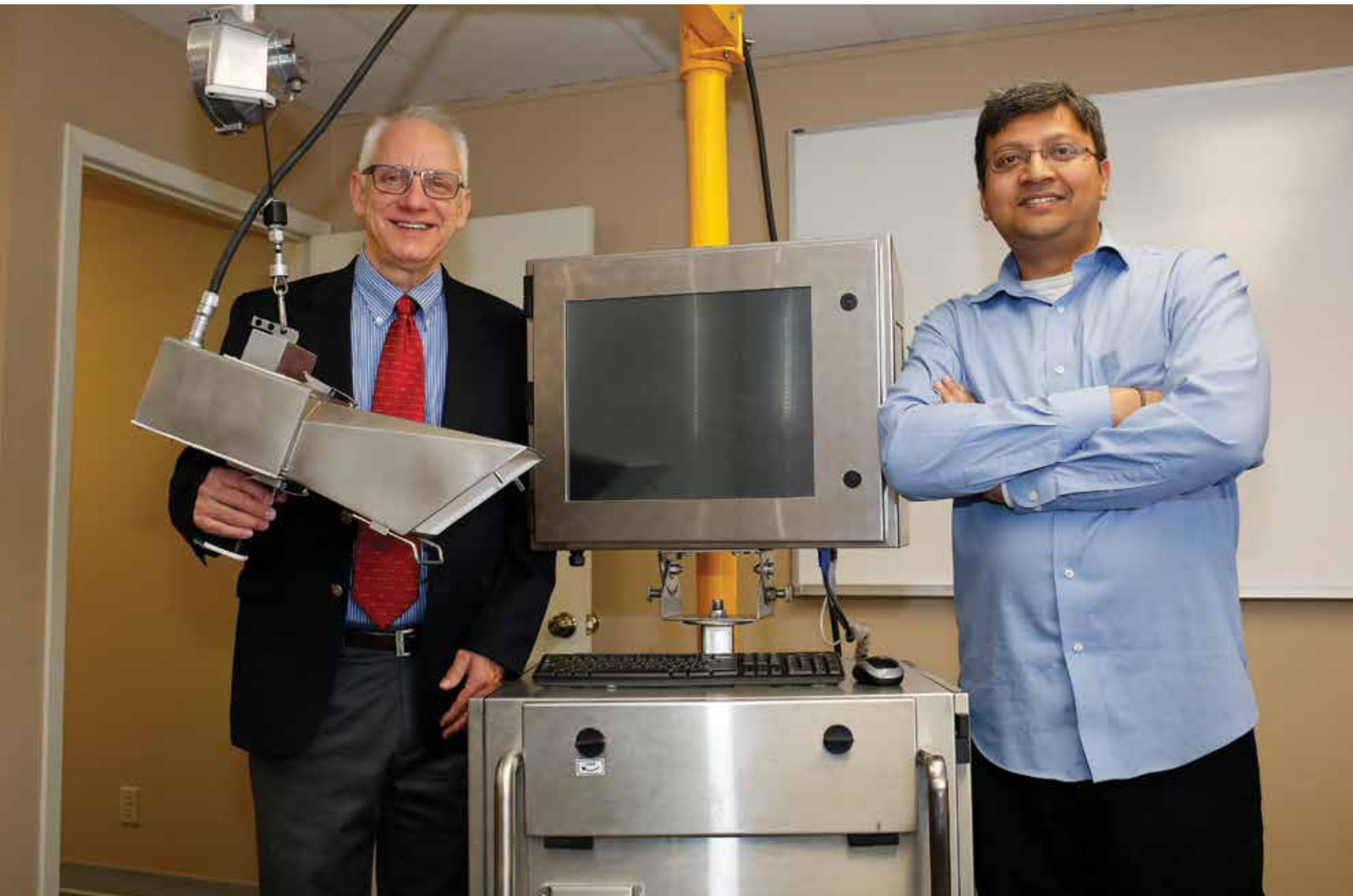
The company's mission is to help mobility-challenged people to lead more active, productive and happier lives. It strives to improve designs for better adaptability in everyday use. It encourages customer input and can adapt many products to meet



specific needs.

Waldrep says that as a family-owned company, Prairie View Industries believes in sharing its success with its employees and the community. A well-earned reputation for high quality helps the company maintain a positive way of life for its more than 100 employees.

"Roger has helped us as we further our growth," Waldrep says. "He reaches out to us quite frequently with useful information and ideas. We expect to expand that relationship in the future." ■



From left: Chris Calkins and Govindarajan Konda Naganathan



# INNOVATION BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

**G**oldfinch Solutions, a University of Nebraska-Lincoln faculty startup company, is pioneering multispectral imaging technology to identify tender beef at the packing stage of production. It has called upon the Nebraska Business Development Center (NBDC) for assistance since its founding in 2008.

“When our company first formed, we wanted to apply for a SBIR (Small Business Innovation Research program) Phase I grant,” says company President Jeyam Subbiah, Ph.D. “We worked with NBDC early on to successfully obtain this funding.”

Subbiah says Marisol Rodriguez, who was NBDC’s technology commercialization specialist at that time, provided guidance in navigating the grant application process. “We were in panic mode at the time, trying to meet USDA deadlines,” Subbiah says. “She was very helpful, even working on the weekend.”

Senior Vice President Chris Calkins, Ph.D., agrees. “With NBDC’s help, we got where we needed to be a lot faster and with a lot less stress.”

Current director of NBDC’s technology commercialization program, Wei Jing, says that since 2008, Goldfinch Solutions has received a total of \$850,000 in funding from two SBIR Phase I grants, one SBIR Phase IB grant, and one SBIR Phase II grant, in addition to support from the Nebraska Department of Economic Development.

Calkins says that during the Phase II application process, “Wei would have answers for us much faster that we could get ourselves. All we had to do was pick up the phone and she was there to help us plug the holes and fill in the gaps.”

Vice president for research and development, Konda Naganathan, says the multispectral imaging technology developed by Goldfinch Solutions is capable of predicting whether a piece of meat will be tender, intermediate or tough with very high accuracy. The hardware and software is not yet on the market.

The imaging system allows the user to certify the tenderness of a rib eye steak and apply that guarantee to similar cuts from same source. “That means the tenderloin, New York strip and flat iron from that same carcass would carry the same tender label,” Calkins says.

He says about 80 percent of all carcasses from fed cattle qualify for a USDA “Choice” or “Prime” rating. “With the current quality grades, it becomes an almost ‘all in one’ category,” he says. “There’s not enough distinction between the ratings.

“We feel cattle that rate ‘Choice’ also merit a tenderness guarantee. If we can screen those cattle and provide that guarantee, we believe consumers would pay a premium for that meat.”

He says that tenderness guarantee is what makes Goldfinch Solutions’ technology unique.

“For 100 years, meat scientists have been trying to figure out how to look at a cut of steak and tell if it is tender,” Calkins says, “but you can’t tell by what you see with the naked eye. With multispectral imaging, we can capture information about that steak that will identify the properties of the muscle and tell us if it is tender or not.”

Subbiah says the company continues to use NBDC as a resource.

“We have attended several NBDC programs, workshops and networking events,” he says. “Wei also invited Chris and I to speak to NBDC groups and meetings and share our SBIR experiences. It is a mutually beneficial relationship.” ■



## 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.

2012 – SectorNow

2013 – LNKChemsolutions

2014 – LI-COR Biosciences

2015 – Windcall Manufacturing (GrainGoat)

2016 – Goldfinch Solutions

## TOP BLOCK



Back row from left: Ryan Collison, president/partner; Beau Collison, equipment and product development director/partner; Kelsey Hakes, marketing coordinator; Joe Stajskal, finance director; Jon Hall, sales manager.  
Front row from left: Dan Chicoine, marketing director; Bob Egermayer, international sales manager; Talisha Walker, office manager/shipping coordinator; Jeffrey Zindel CFO/partner.

# SUSTAINABILITY BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

Success in developing a three-step recycling system that turns scrap concrete, granite, limestone, marble and other mineral materials into sustainable aggregate for various hardscape reusable products such as pavers, construction and retaining wall blocks, earns Top Block of Norfolk the honor of Sustainability Business of the Year.

Top Block President Ryan Collison says Dick Uhing, Procurement Technical Assistance program consultant at the Nebraska Business Development Center (NBDC) office in Wayne, has assisted the company with grant applications and provided information on several beneficial state and federal business development and contracting programs.

“Our goal is to develop relationships with countries overseas to use our MBM500 three-step recycling system,” Collison says. “Dick has been a big help finding those avenues for us and informing us about the government programs that exist and what they can do for us.”

Top Block is the licensing arm for Natural Concrete Products. Since 2002, the company has been developing equipment that would manufacture a decorative landscaping product.

In 2013, the company designed the MBM500, a concrete mixer, material feeder and block machine all rolled into one. Powered by electricity or a fueled power source and requiring little more than a level piece of ground and raw materials, the entire production system can be set up at a jobsite and put to use in minutes.

“Then, we took it to the next level,” Collison says. “We knew a lot of construction materials could be recycled into new products, so we developed a Crusher and a Screener to complement the MBM500.”

Integrating the crusher, screener and MBM500 enables the user to make retaining wall block and pavers from used materials, which might otherwise be disposed of at a landfill.

“With our knowledge and experience, we have created a system that combines these remnants to create professional quality concrete products,” Collison says. “The MBM500’s dual production system allows the manufacturing of both wet and dry cast products.”

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The equipment is portable and versatile, making it ideal for use in areas devastated by natural or man-made disasters.

After an earthquake, for example, the MBM500’s recycling system can be placed in the heart of the destruction zone, using rubble to manufacture new blocks and walls. Collison says it is a focus for Top Block in 2017 to aid the rebuilding efforts in Haiti, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq.

Additionally, Top Block is working with inventor Frank Santoro and New Mexico State University to develop a paper pulp-based construction block utilizing the remnants from the paper production process.

Collison says Uhing and the NBDC office provide valuable assistance.

“We were looking for a contactor in the Haiti reconstruction and Dick tracked him down for us,” he says. “We needed an experienced mediator to let us know what is available and Dick has been that for us. He really goes the extra mile and our relationship with NBDC has been a great partnership.” ■



## 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.

2012 - ServiceMaster

2013 - The Grey Plume

2014 - Greenhouse in the Snow

2015 - Sand Creek Post & Beam

2016 - Top Block



## MANUFACTURING BUSINESS OF THE YEAR



**H**ornady Manufacturing Company — a world leader in bullet, ammunition, re-loading tool, accessory design and manufacturing in Grand Island — has been a client of the Nebraska Business Development Center (NBDC) since 2004.

Founded in 1949 by Joyce Hornady, the company began making bullets in a rented garage in downtown Grand Island. The business remains family-owned today.

Hornady Manufacturing became an NBDC client when it sought the assistance of Scott Knapp of the Procurement Technical Assistance program in Kearney. Knapp provided Hornady general contracting assistance, including information about the Central Contractor Registry (CCR), Online Representations and Certifications Application (ORCA) and advice on responding to solicitations.

Chuck Beck replaced Knapp as NBDC's consultant in Kearney, continuing to assist the company. Beck helps the company update and renew its System for Award Management (SAM) registration, develop its Dynamic Small Business Search profile, and provides information regarding government contracting.

In 2013, Beck reviewed the company's BidMatch profile and was able to improve the notifications BidMatch provides. That led to an increase from roughly 50 notifications each month to approximately 500 per month. Hornady Manufacturing

reviews BidMatch notifications to respond to solicitations, or to forward them to their distribution network as possibly opportunities.

Scott Javins, Law Enforcement/Military Product Manager, says the BidMatch profile is a source of many opportunities.

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*“Every day, we receive updates regarding new contracts being posted and which agencies are specifying our ammunition in their contracts,” he says. “The advanced search Chuck arranged gives us even more detailed information.”*

Tracking government contracting opportunities and tapping into Beck's knowledge and NBDC's services helps the company achieve its goals and vision, Javins says. “Chuck does a great job, not only dealing with our SAM registration but he also has a lot of insight on what they are specifically looking for and knows how we do business,” he says.

The NBDC offers other valuable opportunities, Javins says, including a “Meet the Buyers” event he attended in Omaha. “This event allowed us an opportunity to not only meet the buyers from various government entities,” he says, “it also allowed us to see what other government contractors are doing, even if they aren't in the ammunition industry.”

The first year of business, Hornady Bullets' total sales were \$10,000 — a figure that increased

three-fold the next year. Today, Hornady Manufacturing has more than 300 employees and in one day — on one press—is capable of turning out more bullets than the company's entire production that first year.

The recipient of numerous industry awards, Hornady Manufacturing is generous to the Grand Island community, supporting organizations and charitable events including United Way, Platte River Charity Shoot, Heartland Public Shooting Park, Hope Harbor, Central-Plains Chapter of the American Red Cross, Stuhr Museum and others.

Javins says that as Hornady Manufacturing continues to expand its facilities and operations, including adding employees and new machinery, the company looks for unique ways to serve the market. “We strive to be innovative and forward-looking as we continue to invest in the future.” ■

**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.

2012 – Tri-V Tool & Manufacturing

2013 – Certified Transmission

2014 – KZCO

2015 – Brand Hydraulics

2016 – Hornady Manufacturing

## INTERNATIONAL PROPELLER SERVICE



Bob Finke



## EXPORT BUSINESS OF THE YEAR



**F**rom Argentina to Egypt and Denmark to South Africa, International Propeller Service in Lincoln has shipped to customers around the world. As the company looks to expand that global presence, along with its government contracting, it comes to the consultants at Nebraska Business Development Center (NBDC) for advice and assistance.

Bob Finke, managing member of International Propeller Service, says the company has sold parts and overhauled airplane propellers for clients in 43 countries since April 2012.

To help expand International Propeller Service's overseas presence in select foreign markets, Josh Nichol-Caddy, NBDC export consultant and market research analyst, conducted international market research through the State Trade Expansion Program (STEP), funded in part through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA). STEP funds are awarded by the SBA and, in Nebraska, applied for and administered by the state's Department of Economic Development.

"I provide reports based on a company's specific interests," Nichol-Caddy says. "It details what the market looks like and identifies potential leads."

Finke says he has also received assistance from NBDC Procurement Technical Assistance program consultant Roger McCullough.

"Roger contacted me and helped me through the

SAM (federal System for Award Management) registration process," says Finke. "He came down to our shop, sat right next to me and walked me through the process. His experience has been very helpful."

Finke says his services are complicated and time consuming. "It's expensive to be in this business," he says. "My shop has to be certified by the FAA (Federal Aviation Administration). Every part we use has to be traceable to an approved vendor and logged in software programs. Even my tooling has to be calibrated annually."

He says airplane propellers have to be maintained at certain intervals, based either on length of time between maintenance or hours in flight.

*"An overhaul is a job that takes 40 hours, minimum," he says. "There are only 30 shops in the country that do this kind of work."*

Finke began working at Duncan Aviation's propeller shop in Lincoln in 1987. Because Duncan's employees worked on all aspects of the propeller overhaul process, Finke learned a vast array of repair and maintenance tasks including pre-function testing of the propeller, disassembly, cleaning and inspecting all parts, blade grinding, paint and finish, installing deice boots, parts ordering, and reassembly of the sub components and the entire propeller.

He earned his repair certification from the FAA in 1989 and was a qualified inspector for Duncan, where he became team leader of the propeller shop in 1999. In 2012, Finke joined with a longtime

friend and opened International Propeller Service's Nebraska facility.

In January 2016, Scott Lau, a co-worker from Duncan Aviation became a partner and they opened the FAA Part 145 Repair Station so they can repair and overhaul propellers for customers globally.

Finke says he appreciates the guidance and knowledge McCullough and Nichol-Caddy supply. "If I have a question about numbers or proper procedures, like which countries I need an export license to ship to, I know I can contact them and they will get right back to me," he says. "When you are as busy as I am, getting an answer right away really helps." ■

**EXPORT BUSINESS OF THE YEAR**  
is awarded to a Nebraska business that successfully sells and delivers products or services internationally.

- 2013 - Elliott Equipment
- 2014 - Bruckman Rubber
- 2015 - New Grand Ocean International
- 2016 - International Propeller Service



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