



Small business and Lab honored for mentoring partnership

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John McKinstry, a first Gulf War veteran who suffered service-related injuries, launched RG Construction Services LLC in Rio Rancho in 2004. By capitalizing on two years of intensive mentoring from Los Alamos National Laboratory's Small Business Program, RG Construction Services has grown from an electrical contractor with six employees, performing jobs worth a few hundred thousand dollars, to a general contractor with 15 employees, running projects worth several million dollars each.

Based on this transformative outcome, which exceeded the requirements of the mentor-protégé agreement and groomed RG Construction Services to compete for federal contracts, the U.S. Department of Energy's Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU) recently presented the DOE Mentor of the Year award to Los Alamos National Security, LLC, and the DOE Protégé of the Year award to RG Construction Services.

RG Construction Services owner John McKinstry and Los Alamos Small Business Program Manager Chris Fresquez at the New Mexico Veterans Business Expo & Job Fair in 2014, the year McKinstry's mentor-protégé journey began.

The Laboratory's Mentor-Protégé Program is a DOE initiative designed to encourage and assist small and disadvantaged businesses; the mentor typically works with one business at a time for two years. This program contributes toward DOE's mission and small business goals, and it helps local businesses grow and expand, contributing to regional economic development.

"We are committed to ensuring our small businessmen and women have a fair opportunity to compete for contracts and subcontracts, providing crucial services to our government and the American people," says OSDBU Acquisition Specialist Anita Anderson.

"What I wanted out of this program was growth—controlled growth," McKinstry says. "I don't just want to get millions of dollars of work. I want to ensure our company has the skills and knowledge to do the work well."

When McKinstry was accepted into the Mentor-Protégé Program in 2014, he had no formal business plan. Through a partnership organized by the Laboratory, he worked alongside University of New Mexico Anderson School of Management graduate students to develop a functional business plan. He also developed a website, marketing plan, accounting practices, and other operating procedures. His technical mentor,

Mike Kuzmack of the Weapon Stockpile Modernization (Q) Division, assisted him with change orders and project management, as well as safety and security requirements. In the year ahead, McKinstry plans to focus on developing networking skills.

McKinstry says he recommends the program to other small businesses: “The Laboratory is willing to answer our questions. You just have to be willing to ask.”

The Los Alamos Mentor-Protégé Program was loosely organized for years until 2013, when Jim Carrigan (ASM-SBP) redefined the mentoring process and garnered a Distinguished Performance Award for his efforts. Now businesses are selected as protégés through a competitive application process, held in August. The mentor signs an agreement with the protégé, committing to enhance the company’s capabilities and ability to compete in any market.

Protégés learn how to perform contracts and subcontracts for federal projects, giving them visibility within the DOE complex. In turn, Los Alamos gains more procurement options as it strives to meet its small business goals, set each year with DOE’s National Nuclear Security Administration.

“The LANL Small Business Program will continue to seek opportunities to mentor other viable suppliers and work to create the next success story,” says Small Business Program Manager Chris Fresquez.

The Laboratory is committed to working with small and other disadvantaged businesses. To ensure a percentage of Laboratory procurements are placed with these businesses, the Laboratory develops goals each year with the U.S. Department of Energy. The Laboratory’s Small Business Program works to identify viable suppliers in each of these categories and tracks its procurement performance against these goals.

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