

For Many Veterans It is About Coming Home and Starting a Business
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November 11th is Veteran's Day and it is a good time to reflect on the veteran-owned business community. Today there are approximately 25 million living American veterans who have served and sacrificed their lives to protect our nation and maintain our freedoms. There are approximately 4.2 to 5.5 million veteran-owned businesses in the United States. There are over 400,000 small businesses owned by service-disabled veterans.

During this time it is especially important that America's military veterans return home to jobs and opportunity. We can never fully repay these patriots for their sacrifice and the sacrifices of their families, but we can provide an environment in which they can strive to reach their full economic potential and fulfill their small business dreams.

Since 1953, the U.S. Small Business Administration has been providing entrepreneurial assistance to veterans and service-disabled veterans who return home to start, resume, or further grow their businesses.

Finance Programs:

Veterans who need financial assistance and business counseling can get them, and both are increasingly available.

Each year since 2001, the number of loan guarantees for veterans in the SBA's loan programs has expanded – from 5,105 loans worth \$1.36 billion in 2001 to 8,503 amounting to \$1.64 billion in 2006.

The SBA offers a targeted loan program to help keep businesses operating during the critical months when their key employees or owners are called to active duty. The SBA's Military Reserve Economic Injury Disaster Loan program has more than doubled its low-interest loans in this program from \$3.5 million in 2002 to \$9 million in 2006. Helping to keep these businesses whole and afloat also saves jobs in their local communities.

Training and Counseling:

SBA's Veterans Business Outreach Centers, located in key regions throughout the country, have provided counseling services and training to more than 75,000 veteran entrepreneurs over the past four years, and more and more vets are seeking these services.

SCORE, Counselors to America's Small Business, also has special veterans counselors and has been averaging more than 26,000 counseling sessions to vets over the same period. In addition, each SBA District Office has a veterans business development officer available for counseling vets exclusively.

SBA's Small Business Development Centers (SBDC) offer one-stop assistance to individuals and small businesses by providing a wide variety of information and guidance in central and easily accessible branch locations. The program is a cooperative effort of the private sector, the educational community and federal, state and local governments.

Procurement Programs:

The Federal Government is also looking to do business Veteran-owned and with Service-Disabled Veteran-owned business. The SBA has established the Office of Federal Contract Assistance for Veteran Business Owners to help them gain better access to the federal contracting marketplace.

Other Federal Agencies have developed strategies to increase the number of prime contracts and subcontracts awarded to service-disabled veterans. The Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business Program offers sole source and set-aside procurement opportunities. For more information contact us at 215-580-2706 or www.SBA.gov/vets.

Local Initiatives:

The Philadelphia District Office participates in many local veterans conferences, seminars, and workshops. We also participate with the Greater Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce in their "Networking Your Business" program. This ongoing initiative targets veteran entrepreneurs; specifically, existing service disabled veteran-owned small businesses and veteran-owned small businesses offering business educational and networking opportunities.

Local Success Stories:

Union Packaging Inc. (UP) – Michael Pearson, President and Founder of UP, is also a former Army officer. UP manufactures folding cartons for the fast food restaurant industry. UP supplies several of the largest U.S. multinationals, including Burger King, Wendy's and McDonald's. Pearson worked with consultants at the University of Pennsylvania SBDC to complete his business plan.

International Hardwood Resources – Adam Rousselle operates International Hardwood and is a combat wounded Army Veteran. They specialize in exporting hardwood products to several foreign markets. Rousselle uses SBA's International trade loans to supplement his extensive working capital requirements.

Since its founding more than a half-century ago, the U.S. Small Business Administration has delivered approximately 24 million loans, loan guarantees, contracts, counseling sessions and other forms of assistance to small businesses. In the Small Business Act of July 30, 1953, Congress created the U.S. Small Business Administration, whose function is to "aid, counsel, assist and protect, insofar as is possible, the interests of small business concerns." The charter also stipulated that the SBA would ensure small businesses a "fair proportion" of government contracts and sales of surplus property. For more information about the SBA online, go to www.sba.gov