



# ***SUCCESS STORY***

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## **Displaying His Success Comes Naturally to Local Entrepreneur; SBA Contracting Program Helps Company Grow**

**EDGEWATER PARK, NJ---**Al Bullock doesn't mind that his success is on display for the whole world to see. The owner of JADA Creative Communications wouldn't have it any other way. That's because his Edgewater Park-based business is a full service graphic design and production agency that specializes in high-quality tradeshow and exhibit materials.

To really understand Bullock's journey to entrepreneurship you have to start when he was a young teenager building houses with his late father in North Carolina. "I hated working outdoors and I knew then that building houses wasn't for me," said Bullock. What he did know, is that he liked working with wood. So he packed his bags and headed to New York City.

He immediately found work with a company that specialized in kitchens and bathrooms. "That's where I learned layout and design," said Bullock. "I gained some experience and confidence during that first job."

### **Fate Takes a Hand**

At the age of 21 Bullock's journey took an unusual turn. While looking for a new job, he answered an ad for a carpenter/cabinet maker position, but dialed the wrong number! Simon Malkin, the owner of a totally different company told him there must have been a mistake and that he wasn't looking for anyone. As incredible as it sounds, Malkin's business also required wood working skills and Bullock mentioned to Malkin that he heard the sound of an electric saw cutting wood in the background. The conversation continued and after telling Bullock he didn't need anyone Malkin inadvertently told him the company's address. Bullock sensed there was something fateful about getting that address explaining, "I felt he 'gave' me that address for a reason."

Determined, Bullock went to see Mr. Malkin. "I told him that I didn't want any money," said Bullock. "I just told him I wanted the opportunity to learn and began to help him. By the end of the day he offered to pay me, but I refused." Not a word was said about coming back, but Bullock got up early the next morning and was waiting for Malkin with an extra cup of coffee waiting for him. When Malkin saw Bullock, he smiled and said, "I was hoping you would come back."

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Believe it or not, on that second day, Malkin asked Bullock if he would like to own the company! Seeing that Bullock could not come up with the financing, Malkin made an arrangement that would allow Bullock to pay him monthly until he would gain full ownership of the company.

So Bullock assumed control of the company and Anything of Wood was born. He worked hard, developed new customers and grew the company. He learned all the aspects of running a business. He saved enough money to buy an engagement ring for his soon to be wife Joyce. The idea was to move to the suburbs of Pennsylvania and start a family. He married Joyce, sold his first company and then started a second company in Pennsylvania. It was there that a local newspaper did a feature story on Bullock and his new business.

As fate would have it, that article would make its way to the offices of Tony Lee Associates, a Trenton-based manufacturer of trade show displays. The owner of the company read the article with interest and dispatched some company reps to visit with Bullock. Impressed with his knowledge of wood, Tony Lee Associates offered Bullock \$10,000 for his business and a position with the company.

It was there that he learned how to manufacture displays. More importantly, he learned to hone his skills as a sales rep for the company. He excelled in sales and brought in new clients like AT&T and Janssen Pharmaceuticals. “My plan was to work for Tony Lee Associates for five years; I stayed ten,” said Bullock. “It was a beautiful experience. When I was finished designing and making exhibits, I was encouraged to see what they were doing in the studio. I took notes on silk screening, photography and graphic design. I basically learned all phases of the business. It just prepared me well for the next phase in my life.”

### **A Newborn, a New Company and the SBA**

Little did Bullock know that next phase would bring the birth his first child, Jada into his and Joyce’s lives. They had tried for years to have children, then Jada was born and with her so was Bullock’s third company, JADA Creative Communications ([www.jadacreative.com](http://www.jadacreative.com)). Named after his first daughter, the company was started on Bullock’s first father’s day. In 1997, he moved on from Tony Lee Associates and hasn’t looked back.

Bullock took what he learned and developed a company that specializes in high-quality tradeshow and exhibit materials. After his first six years in business, Bullock realized in order to take his company to the next level he needed to expand his market. That’s when he turned to the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) for assistance. He learned about SBA’s 8(a) program, a program that helps small business owners gain access to federal government contracts. To qualify for the program, a small business must be owned and controlled by a socially and economically disadvantaged individual. Under the Small Business Act, certain presumed groups include African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Asian Pacific Americans, Native Americans, and Subcontinent Asian Americans. As an African-American, Bullock qualified to participate in SBA’s 8(a)

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contracting program and in August of 2003, he received his participation certification.

According to SBA’s New Jersey District Director James A. Kocsi, participants of the program are eligible to be considered for sole-source contracts up to \$3.5 million for goods and services and \$5.5 million for manufacturing. Contracts higher than those amounts must be bid on competitively amongst 8(a) firms.

During his third year in the 8(a) program, Bullock received his first contract from the United States Army. JADA Creative Communications was asked to supply 2,000 recruiting tabletop displays for the Army with a contract worth \$2 million. And just recently, the United States Army awarded the company a \$3 million contract to supply a special T-shirt for the Army.

“SBA’s 8(a) program has certainly opened up some doors for JADA Creative Communications,” said Bullock. “We have been fortunate to land two lucrative contracts. We pride ourselves on producing quality products and services. We have three more years in the 8(a) program and hope to secure additional contracts with federal government agencies. This program has a way of leveling the playing field for small business owners who want to do business with the federal government.”

Today, the company has 12 employees and boasts a client list that includes: Lockheed Martin ,Boeing, DuPont, Educational Testing Services, General Electric, Janssen Pharmaceuticals, Johnson & Johnson, Mercer County and Penn State.

In addition to making displays, the company offers its clients the option of display storage and updating when they need a new look. JADA Creative Communications also provides corporate identity/branding services, marketing/advertising design campaigns, print design, Web design, photography, illustration, banners, table skirts and promotional items.

“We have in-house capabilities to help our clients communicate their message and present their image,” said Bullock. “I would like to start doing more advertising projects and we have taken the necessary steps to head in that direction. We have assembled a great team that is talented and creative. Recently, we designed a successful billboard and bus shelter ad campaign for the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency on refinancing existing mortgages.”

“It’s great to look back and see how far JADA Creative Communications has come in 12 years,” said Bullock. “The exciting part is looking ahead and knowing that there is so much more to do. But you have to have fun.”

For Al Bullock it’s been nothing but fun—a labor of love as he and his company continue to display their success.

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JADA Creative Communications provides professional design services for local, national and international businesses and organizations. JADA services include web design, branding, marketing, advertising, exhibits, promotional and apparel.

[www.jadacreative.com](http://www.jadacreative.com)

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