

**Protégé becomes mentor – Mandaree firm to help businesses with payroll infrastructure support**  
**INDIAN SMALL BUSINESSES**

MANDAREE., February 18, 2004 – A Mandaree company now has the status of being a mentor for American Indian small businesses nationwide.

Mandaree Enterprise Corp. was awarded a \$306,000 Small Business Administration contract in October 2003 to provide infrastructure support and access for American Indian companies. The award is part of the SBA's Native American economic development initiative.

This month, Mandaree Enterprise began taking applications from clients nationwide for the new mentor program, said Clarence O'Berry, Mandaree, president and chief executive officer of Mandaree Enterprise. He said mentoring will also begin this month.

Mandaree Enterprise will help clients identifying services they need, review resources already available to them and develop an action plan for the business, O'Berry said. He said the action plan will outline what Mandaree Enterprise will provide and show the business who can provide other services for them.

"Then we'll break down the plan into phases and help prioritize," O'Berry said.

Mandaree Enterprise Corp., with headquarters locally, is a full-service information technology and electronic manufacturing corporation. It also operates in several other locations, including Washington, D.C., and has about 70 employees, with 80 percent of them American Indians.

Out of 45 other companies across the country, Mandaree Enterprise was one of three awarded money for the SBA fiscal year 2004 funding, O'Berry said. Mandaree actually was awarded the most money.

Initially, O'Berry said he planned to write the SBA proposal for the local area, the Three Affiliated Tribes and Fort Berthold Reservation. But, he said Mandaree Enterprise has customers "from California to Washington, D.D., and there's no reason we couldn't support John Doe Native American any less than we supported Northrop Grumman down in California, so I opened it up to nationwide."

O'Berry's proposal was different than SBA's request. "I said we already have small business centers and small business consortiums formed out here. We don't need another one, but what these small businesses need or tribal businesses need is access to infrastructure," he said.

"To give you an example, say John Doe Native American is great at hanging drywall, but he doesn't know the business side of it. He doesn't know when you hire an employee, what forms the employee needs to fill out, when you do payroll, what the employers' liabilities are or what taxes are held out of their checks. We can help them with that and let him focus on what he does best – drywall. We can set up an accounting system for him or run it for him," O'Berry said.

Current applications for the Mandaree Enterprise's mentoring service includes two North Dakota clients, one from South Dakota and another from Montana. O'Berry said two of the clients are for grant writing businesses and another is construction.

"We actually had four applications come in that we had to turn down because our clients have to be based on a reservation," O'Berry said.

Clients must be American Indian.

"We anticipate having seven to ten (clients), but it really depends on what they want. If it's a little activity, we can take on more but if it's a major effort, 10 might be too many," he said.

Mentoring is major move for the Mandaree firm. Only about 10 years ago, the company was a protégé of Northrop Grumman Corp, and O'Berry is quick to credit that company for its assistance in helping the Mandaree firm become qualified to win and fulfill federal Department of Defense contracts.

"Northrop Grumman mentored our electronic manufacturing business, and with their help we were able to diversify into other areas, such as information technology. Last year, we did over \$7 million in business, which is a long way from where we started in 1994 with revenues of just 100,000," O'Berry said.

O'Berry is "extremely proud" of the SBA contract "because it puts us in the position where we can give back, and it puts a feather in our hats to say 'hey, we've graduated from being helped to helping others.'"

Although the one-year SBA contract is limited as far as the number of people who can be helped, O'Berry is still looking ahead.

"This opens the door for us to provide this service to other businesses on or off reservation," he said.

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