

CEO works for company to succeed

Mandaree, ND., July 26, 2004 – When Clarence O’Berry was introduced to speak at a Greater North Dakota Association meeting earlier this year, Jay Leitch, dean of North Dakota State university, said: “This is one of our success stories.”

O’Berry and Mandaree Enterprise Corp., the company he runs for the Three Affiliated Tribes, can rightfully claim success.

Last month the company teamed up with one of the world’s leading providers of information technology, Computer Sciences Corp., as part of a Mentor-Protégé Program sponsored by the Department of Homeland Security.

O’Berry also was honored last month as one of the 50 influential minorities in business by the Minority Business & Professionals Network, Inc., and Minority Enterprise Advocate Magazine.

And those are just some of the accolades and accomplishments recently for O’Berry and Mandaree Enterprise.

Last year, Mandaree Enterprise Corp. employed 70 people and did more than \$8 million in business, which is quite a contrast compared to nine years ago when O’Berry took over as its chief executive officer. Then the company had revenues of only about 100,000 and was struggling.

O’Berry, a seemingly tireless individual, has devoted much of his life for the past nine years to building this company owned by the Three Affiliated Tribes from an unknown to one that getting recognition for bringing in major defense manufacturing contracts and other work and responsibilities.

An electronics assembly manufacturer and data entry services provider, currently the company has offices in Mandaree and New Town, and satellite facilities and office in Washington, D.C., and several other cities nationwide and in Hawaii. There are also employees in Thailand and Korea. Employees working in the Baghdad area in Iraq returned to the states this month.

O’Berry, while visiting at the company headquarters in Mandaree, is modest about his accomplishments. He gives much of the for the company’s success to the employees.

“Empowering people” are words he describes his views for business management. “I want others to take their positions seriously, be ready to take responsibility and make decisions,” he said. He said he understands people might make mistakes in doing so.

He has some advice for businesses in North Dakota seeking opportunities. He said businesses need to target, or determine who buys those services or products that they have, and also do a lot of networking. “you can’t do just any one thing – it has to be a combination of all intertwined,” he said.

When O’Berry took over as CEO of Mandaree Enterprise, then Mandaree Electronics, he didn’t know anything about that type of business, he said. So he called people in businesses to ask for their advice that would help him make the Mandaree firm a success.

In an interview July 16, Lee Peterson, North Dakota’s Commerce commissioner and former president of the Minot Area Development Corp., said that he began to work with O’Berry and the Mandaree firm in the early 1990s to help them get funding “and kind of got him started down the road.”

The company received a letter of credit from Minot’s MAGIC Fund to help fund one of the Mandaree firm’s projects, which O’Berry said helped the company get where it’s at today.

“He has just really made that company grow – that building out at Mandaree has been remodeled... It’s just a wonderful, wonderful story,” Peterson said.

"It's done very, very well, and a lot of the reason is because of Clarence O'Berry," Peterson said. "He is an excellent businessman, he knows well how to market the company and find contracts and work on a consistent basis. From my perspective both at the local level and at Minot, and at the state level at the Department of Commerce, it has been an absolute pleasure to work with Clarence," Peterson said.

Terry Wilber, manager of Northrop Grumman Corp. in New Town, said, in an interview in a recent "Minority Enterprise Advocate" magazine that combining creativity and skill gives O'Berry an edge in business. He said O'Berry "doesn't see boundaries."

"It's not about thinking outside the box. He doesn't even see the box," Wilber said.

Mandaree Enterprise started out as an informal protégé, then an official protégé of Northrop Grumman. Now Mandaree Enterprise is a mentor for Native American businesses located in North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana and Nebraska, O'Berry said.

O'Berry has spoken to business groups and others all over the country about the Mandaree firm, its accomplishments and strategies for others in business.

Last fall, the company reached a milestone when it received a new \$1.7 million line of credit from the Native American Bank in Denver.

It was only the second time in the company's history that a tribally owned enterprise successfully acquired an operating loan based solely on its own operating procedures and financial strengths as a stand-alone business, O'Berry said.

O'Berry would like to see the state, Mandaree Enterprise, the tribe and other North Dakota businesses work together more. "I think we could make a huge impact," he said. He feels that would be a great team to go out and get national and global business for this state.

Peterson and O'Berry said they are visiting about other projects for the state and Mandaree Enterprise, which includes Noridian Government Services, which is part of Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Dakota.

As for family, O'Berry, an enrolled member of the Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate Tribe in South Dakota, and his wife, Kathy, an enrolled member of the Three Affiliated Tribes who works at Fort Berthold Housing Authority, have two children Jeremy, 15, and Aric, 7.

Today, Mandaree Enterprise is a totally self-sufficient business from the tribe, and doing business nationwide and overseas.

"We've come a long way from eight to 10 years ago," O'Berry said of Mandaree Enterprise Corp.

"The employees are the backbone of this organization and they really are the ones that make it a success, along with mentors like Terry Wilber and Ron Laverdure. I just help facilitate," O'Berry said. Laverdure, of Fargo, is business developer for Mandaree Enterprise.

(Prairie Profile is a weekly feature profiling interesting people in our region. We welcome suggestions from our readers.)

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