

N.D. tribal enterprise diversifies – Tribal company has Defense contracts

February 2, 2004 – When Clarence O’Berry Jr. took over Mandaree Enterprise Corp. in 1994, the tribal-owned company had five employees, and annual sales of \$100,000.

“We were on the verge of bankruptcy,” the CEO of the North Dakota technology company said Tuesday.

Ten years later, Mandaree Enterprise Corp. has 75 employees, \$10 million in sales and hopes of adding as many as 300 employees in the near future.

O’Berry spoke at a general session of the 2004 North Dakota Business Conference, a two-day Greater North Dakota Association event that wrapped up Tuesday at Fargo’s Holiday Inn.

“They’re a pretty well-kept secret,” said Jay Leitch, dean of the College of Business Administration at North Dakota State University.

Mandaree Enterprise has its headquarters in the village of Mandaree, a community of about 400 near Lake Sakakawea on the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation.

Of 15 institutions operated by Three Affiliated Tribes – composed of the Mandan, Hidatsa, Arikara tribes – Mandaree Enterprises is one of just two that turn a profit. The other is the Four Bears Casino & Lodge across the lake at New Town.

Mandaree Enterprise is composed of three divisions: electronics manufacturing, information technology and computer software and hardware reselling.

Manufacturing takes place in Mandaree. About 40 employees there assemble cables, wires, panel assemblies and components for F-16 and F-18 fighters, B-2 bombers and drone targets under Pentagon contracts.

Expansion is limited because of the area’s sparse population. Of Mandaree’s 400 residents, about half are children. “If we have to grow that, we have to go outside Mandaree,” O’Berry said.

O’Berry, 40, is a member of the Sisseton-Wahpeton Sioux Tribe of North Dakota and South Dakota. O’Berry grew up in Lansing, Mich., but completed high school in Mandaree and attended both Bismarck State University and Fort Berthold Community College.

Under his leadership – and with financial backing from the Minot, N.D., Magic City Fund, the tribe and North Dakota’s Workforce 2000 program – Mandaree Enterprise diversified beyond assembly.

The company today has high-tech contract with the U.S. Department of Defense (including one with the Provisional Authority in Iraq, where four employees are now), Social Security Administration, Department of Housing and Urban Development, Environmental Protection Agency, Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Department of Homeland Security, Department of Agriculture and Small Business Administration.

“They’ve been fairly successful, growing their business,” said James Hirsch, work force division director for the North Dakota Department of Commerce.

Mandaree Enterprise also has operations in New Town and White Shield on the reservation.

Mandaree also has offices in Austin, Texas, and Washington, D.C..

Contracts are being negotiated under which between 25 and 300 employees could be added to the company this year, O’Berry said.

“I don’t go looking for publicity,” O’Berry said. “I try to fly under the radar screen. When someone asks me how we’re doing, I just say that we are doing well.”

SOURCE
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