

CCE Technologies

Severe fluctuations in sales can wreck havoc for any small business. But the Gilbert family has found that contracting with the government can even out unpredictable business cycles. According to Cindy Gilbert Pitts, president of CCE Technologies, government contracting has allowed her firm to ride out the recent recession and retain jobs. Government contracting is “steady work and reliable. It has allowed us to maintain the same amount of business” during uncertain economic times.

CCE Technologies is one of two businesses owned by the Gilbert family. Cindy Pitt's father Steve Gilbert, founded Corrugated Converting Equipment, at the family dining room table in 1985 and soon after brought both his daughter and son into the business. As the company grew, they acquired another firm to form CCE Technologies in 1996. CCE Technologies manufactures mobile power units and fiber optic splicing trailers for the telecommunications and defense industries. The firm employs 15 people in the southern Illinois community of Centralia.

Both Ms. Pitts and her younger brother Bob worked in the business during high school, where they swept floors, cleaned machinery and learned how the company worked. They both now have management positions in the company. Ms. Pitts manages the administration of both corporations and is president of CCE Technologies, a woman owned firm. Her brother manages the production and engineering of both corporations. Ms. Pitts administers both firms, develops all the bidding documents and works with the government procurement agents.

The firm got its start in government contracting in 1996 when Ms. Pitts was introduced to Rich Fyke, director of the John A. Logan College Procurement Technical Assistance Center (PTAC). She learned about the PTAC through a former colleague who worked at the Small Business Development Center at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, who made the connection for Ms. Pitts. The John A. Logan College PTAC is a partner of the Small Business Development Center Network a partner of the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity. Ms. Pitts noted “before working with the PTAC, there was no place that we could go to find out about [government] bidding opportunities. If buying agencies needed our units they would generally call up and go with a local vendor. The business was out there but we didn't know how to go about getting it”, said Ms. Pitts.

As a result of registering with the government Centralized Contractor Registration database, CCE Technologies now receives daily e-mails from the various government buying web sites that advertise solicitations. Ms. Pitts noted “Being able to access the data base has been huge for us. We never would be able to find the correct people without it.”

About half of the contracts they bid, are awarded on based on price alone, but several departments of the military have sought special applications for their units. Ms. Pitts said “For those bids, the military is looking for past performance and is concerned about quality first and price second.” The largest contract the company has received at \$175,119 was for the Department of the Navy, which uses their portable trailers for recruiting stations at special events around the country.

Being a small business, as well as a women-owned firm has helped land some contracts with the government. According to Ms. Pitts the company still has to provide a good product at a competitive price. “We are not a large business. We are a small business in a small town. Without their (PTAC) assistance we would have probably never been awarded the contracts we were awarded”, said Ms. Pitts.

The John A Logan College Procurement Technical Assistance Center is a member of the Illinois Small Business Development Center Network, working in partnership with the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity's Small Business Development Center and the US Small Business Administration.