

Skyline Decorating Inc.

Getting recruited to play for the Chicago Cubs or any professional sports team, is an arduous process: skill, talent, practice and perseverance are all hallmarks of great players who make it. The same seems to be true for a woman-owned commercial painting contractor that sought commercial painting work at Wrigley Field.

Sheryl Myhre, owner of Skyline Decorating Inc. had contacted Wrigley Field about providing them with commercial painting services “several times, but never got anywhere” she said. Like so many other new companies, Skyline Decorating Inc., had to convince Wrigley Field that her company could serve their needs better than the current painting contractor that the team “had used for years. To complicate the situation, every painting contractor in the city has been trying to break into Wrigley Field with no success.”

Ms. Myhre decided to go out on her own in January 2000 as an interior designer, after working for several years as an interior designer and then in sales in a commercial architectural products company. After two years in business, Ms. Myhre was repeatedly asked if she knew any good painters and realized that her best options for expanding her business and making greater profits lay in the commercial painting business. So in early 2002, Ms. Myhre decided to change the focus of her business to commercial painting, and she hired her first employee in October 2002.

“The timing seemed to be right” for her to go out on her own she said, adding that “as a union shop, providing commercial painting and decorating services, we could keep a core crew of people busy.” Currently Skyline Decorating Inc. has a crew of 18 working, and has had up to 30 people working on large jobs.

Prior to incorporating her company in November 2003, Ms. Myhre decided to become certified with the State of Illinois as a Women’s Business Enterprise which would allow her to bid on contracts with provisions for set asides for women and minority owned businesses. She submitted the WBE paper work herself, but felt that she was still a “very small business, and not yet a confident business owner.” After receiving her certification, and submitting some quotes, she realized that she was not making the most of this certification and turned to the Women’s Business Development Center (WBDC) for help. The Women’s Business Development Center one of 40 Small Business Development Centers around the state that provide assistance to entrepreneurs and business owners and is supported by the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity.

At the WBDC Ms. Myhre met Kristen Johnson who helped her develop the package to gain certification as a City of Chicago WBE. In turning to the WBDC, Ms. Myhre felt that she was no longer “on her own and that there was a group of people wanting to help me and my business. The WBDC has proven to be a very valuable asset.” Ms. Myhre noted “being a WBE gives Skyline Decorating an opportunity to bid on projects we might not get to bid on otherwise. However, you still have to provide good service, and exceed the needs of your customers, to get the work.”

One of the other services available from WBDC was a mailing list of companies interested in using women and minority owned firms. Ms. Myhre noticed Wrigley Field among the many companies on the WBDC mailing list, and contacted and followed up with them on a regular basis seeking painting contracts. Ms. Myhre knew that the Cubs had used the same painting contractor “for years but opportunities can present themselves at any time.”

In March, 2004 “out of the blue” Ms. Myhre got a call from WBDC requesting information about Skyline Decorating, because the WBDC had been contacted by Wrigley Field seeking a list of painting contractors with WBE participation. After providing the requested information to WBDC, Ms. Myhre was contacted by Wrigley Field directly several days later, asking for a quote for their annual spring painting before the season opener. Given the small amount of time that the Cubs allowed to prepare the quote, Ms. Myhre “did the best I could and sent the emailed our bid.”

Thinking that landing this contract was still “a long shot,” Ms. Myhre sent a member of her painting crew that had worked at Wrigley Field before, over to the ball park to talk to “anyone he could find.” When her crew member could not locate anyone and returned to his job site, Ms. Myhre “told him to go back over to Wrigley Field again.” This time the painter was able to talk to someone in Wrigley Field’s maintenance department that he had worked with before, thus reestablishing their personal relationship and showing that Skyline Decorating could “put qualified and knowledgeable people who had worked at Wrigley before, to work on the project.” While the crew member did not meet with management or any other decision maker, Ms. Myhre felt that “just the whispers of our name” could make a difference in getting awarded the painting contract. Finally a week later, the call came that Skyline had gotten the long sought after spring painting contract.

For a Skyline Decorating, “a small business starting out, high profile contracts like this, working at Wrigley Field, make people look at you more closely” said Ms. Myhre. “We also did the painting for Marshall Field’s recent renovation of their State Street store, and these jobs do catch people’s eye. Somehow people think you are more reputable and credible by getting that kind of work. It is very important for us, a young business, to be associated with projects like that.”

The Women’s Business Development Center is a member of the Illinois Small Business Development Center network, working in partnership with the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity and the U.S. Small Business Administration.