

## **SOUTHWIND CONSTRUCTION COMPANY, INC. – an SBA Section 8(a) Success Story**

This is the story of how the Small Business Administration and the 8(a) program changed my life and allowed me to change the lives of others.

### **EARLY YEARS**

My father, “Redman”, was full blood and a Golden Gloves boxer. My white mother was the daughter of a strict Methodist preacher. Born premature at Pawnee Indian Hospital, I began life in 1957 as the first born of two 19 year old “kids” from *completely* different backgrounds. One perhaps, soothing the effects of the “Trail of Tears” with alcohol and the other, preaching the “word” while quietly condemning the marriage to an “Indian”. Alcohol and its complete obliteration of anything worthwhile eventually ended the marriage. When I was 13 years old, my father pronounced me “man of the house” and gave me the authority and responsibility of taking care of my mother and two younger brothers. This would later cause me enormous emotional problems.

### **HARD TIMES**

We never had any money to start with and that certainly was the case after the divorce. As the oldest of three boys (“and man of the house”), I helped my mother make ends meet by doing odd jobs after school and on weekends. I felt shame in having to survive on food stamps and hide from my friends that I was the janitor at the local theater hangout. Although I was unaware of it at the time, being both an adolescent and surrogate “man of the house” created emotional conflict. Anger, knocking holes in walls, and fighting became my primary means of dealing with these emotions and in particular, when it came to my mother and brothers. Fortunately, sports and compassionate coaches helped motivate me from straying too far off course. I graduated from Edmond Memorial High School in 1975.

### **HOPE FOR A BETTER LIFE**

My hope was that a college education would provide me the means of getting out of poverty. The downside: no money, no car. The upside: I could qualify for a low income BEOG grant, BIA grant, and low interest student loan; I could work part-time and of course “bum” a ride for a while. Since I had become quite “technically” proficient in repairing holes in drywall, it’s not surprising that I chose to pursue a degree in Construction Management. With the “Seminole” will to survive, I never lost sight of my hope and eventually graduated from Oklahoma State University in 1980 with a Bachelor of Science in Engineering Technology, Construction Management degree.

### **STARTING A CAREER**

Upon graduation I began work with a large construction firm, J.W. Bateson Company in Dallas, Texas. I worked in the Dallas estimating department for about a year and a half and was subsequently assigned to the OKC VA Hospital project, a \$33 million three year project in Oklahoma City. After completion of the VA project, I decided to stay in Oklahoma and found work with a small construction firm, Timberlake Construction Company, in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

### **ALCOHOLISM**

Obvious (to others anyway) signs of a drinking problem were meshed throughout my college days and early working career. Blackouts were common. I thought firsthand knowledge of seeing Redman drink

himself to death would surely be enough to save me from this insidious disease. I was wrong. Without my knowledge or consent, somewhere along the way I had succumbed to alcoholism....terror, bewilderment, frustration, despair. With the help of a mentor and the Power of a "Spirit of the Universe", my journey of sobriety and the unravelling of deep emotional wounds began in August of 1987. Sobriety brought healing and courage. With courage, the faint idea of starting a business would eventually become a reality.

### **SOUTHWIND CONSTRUCTION COMPANY, INC.**

As its sole owner and shareholder, I incorporated Southwind in October of 1991. Still employed with Timberlake, I made a bedroom of our small house into an office and worked late nights, early mornings, and weekends reading the SBA's regulations concerning SDB (Small and Disadvantaged Business) programs, making contacts, etc. "Good ideas" can only go so far. Without capital or experience, most of my efforts were dead ends. Eventually however, I did find the right people willing to help and, with the help of the SBA, formulated a Joint Venture to provide the capital, bonding and experience necessary to complement my management abilities. The Joint Venture successfully completed several multi-year IDIQ JOC and SABER type contracts, which provided Southwind the foundation it needed to take the next step – the SBA's Section 8(a) program.

### **THE 8(a) PROGRAM**

I believe Southwind to be the perfect candidate for which the 8(a) program was designed. Definitely a "disadvantaged individual" (half-breed, alcoholic) with a potential for success....but lacking the resources and contracts necessary to foster growth. Southwind entered the program in May 1997 and graduated in May 2006. During this time period, Southwind's annual revenues increased from an average of \$2.5 million a year to a sustained average of \$25 million a year. Our employee numbers went from five to thirty five. The 8(a) program fostered not only business growth but my own personal growth as well. I learned from my SBA and Government counterparts that success isn't necessarily measured by revenues; but rather accountability, honesty, integrity, mutual respect and performance of the work. I'm forever grateful to have participated in SBA's 8(a) Business Development Program. It allowed me opportunities I never dreamed possible.

### **SOUTHWIND CONSTRUCTION SERVICES, LLC.**

Prior to graduating the 8(a) program, my SBA and Government counterparts, as well as fellow business associates, encouraged me to create a "continuation" plan. Obviously, without the 8(a) program, we would now be in a competitive market environment on a full-time basis. And from a personal standpoint, 15 years as the sole owner and decision maker was starting to wear on me. These and other factors led to the creation of Southwind Construction Services, LLC in May of 2007. As Managing Member and majority owner of Southwind Construction Services LLC, I was able to: utilize past performance experience; reward two key employees an ownership stake for their dedication and loyalty; and provide better management oversight and decision making. Last but not least, it has allowed me the opportunity to give back to the 8(a) program by working with struggling or up and coming 8(a) firms that might need a helping hand. To date, Southwind Construction Services maintains annual revenues of \$25 million, employs thirty five people, and has helped a number of both individual and tribally owned 8(a) companies develop their businesses.