

# House Veterans' Services and Emergency Preparedness

Testimony on Thursday, April 25, 2013

From

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Mr. Chairman and members of the committee:

My name is Rob Campbell. I am the director of the Clackamas Small Business Development Center (SBDC) located at the Harmony Campus in Milwaukie, Oregon.

I am here today to discuss our center's Veteran's programs that include our Veteran's Small Business Management programs and our Veteranspreneurship class for start-ups.

Before I describe the specifics of our Veteran's programs, I would like to give a brief overview of our Clackamas SBDC. As you may know, we are one of nineteen SBDC's in the State of Oregon. We are the designated Veteran's SBDC in the Metropolitan area and receive referrals from Mount Hood Community College in Gresham and Portland Community College. In addition to being the Veteran's SBDC, we are well known for our marketing, Quick-Books programs, contractor's certification training, and education services provided to Latino contractors.

There are approximately 16,000 businesses in Clackamas County, 4000 are single owner companies working out of their home. Of the remaining 12,000 businesses, approximately 80% fall under the domain of the SBDC. The larger companies in the County are served by Customized training and Workforce departments at the College. Both the SBDC and Customized training/workforce provide services to the business community under the umbrella of the Clackamas Community College Center for Business and Industry.

During calendar year 2012, the Clackamas SBDC provided services to approximately 1300 clients. We held 75 training events with 842 attendees. We provided 1864 hours of no cost counseling services to our small business clients. We were responsible for creating 32 new business starts during the year. Our goal for this year is 50 new starts.

In 2012, we nominated Mr. Chip Sammons, owner and founder of the Holistic Pet Center, for the National Small Business Administration Small Business Person of the Year award. Even though Mr. Sammons did not win the national award, he was selected as the Small Business Person of the Year for the State of Oregon. Mr. Marshall Doyle, owner of Cal-Cert, has been nominated for this year's award. Both Mr. Sammons and Mr. Doyle are Veterans and have been long-term clients of the Clackamas SBDC.

To explain our Veteran's programs, I would like to start with my own story on how I got involved at the Clackamas SBDC. In the fall of 2010, I attended a small business fair at the Portland Convention Center. I was there because of long-time friend of mine, Alan Zell, was the keynote luncheon speaker. I have known Alan for years but lost touch over time so I thought I would reconnect. I got there early and had some time to kill. I sat in on a presentation called the "10 small business myths" given by Dr. Thomas Jones. In this presentation Dr. Jones described his small business model that he had perfected with 25 years working with small business owners: over 2000 businesses, 600 of which were start-ups, with 11 failures during this 25 year period. After his presentation, I decided to introduce myself and ask more questions about his model. (I thought his statistics were too good to be true and I wanted to ask him more questions to see if he was the real deal.) I found out he was a Viet Nam veteran, 1/12th Cav, and carried an M-60. I am also a Viet Nam combat vet who served in the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne and 1/7<sup>th</sup> Cav. I also carried an M-60. We had instant rapport and immediate comradery.

Thomas told me the SBDC had obtained SBA Veterans' grant money to do a Veteran's small business management pilot program using his material. He said if I wanted to attend the class, they would pay my tuition – all I had to do was show up. I have an extensive business background and had my degree and really wasn't interested in going back to school, especially 3 hours after work on Thursday nights. After follow up phone calls and email exchanges, I did decide to attend his class. What I discovered was Thomas was the real deal, and even though I have lived in the Portland area since 1983, I could not believe that a business resource this valuable was a 'best kept secret'. During that class, I decided I could help change this perception by volunteering some time to help get the word out – especially to Veterans.

I guess you can say the rest is history. I met Tim Shea, now the retired SBDC director and attended the Veteranpreneurship class (Greenhouse). When Tim decided to retire after 20 years at the SBDC, he persuaded me to teach the Greenhouse class. About a year ago, I had a chance to interview for the Director's job and here I am. I have a passion for small business owners and a passion to help Veterans, so this is the perfect job for me at this time in my career.

When I showed up at the first orientation meeting for the pilot Veteran's small business management class, there were approximately 100 people wanting to learn more. Of this number, 62 Veterans signed up for the inaugural class. Since September 2010, we have had 131 Veterans attend either Greenhouse, Small Business Management (SBM) I, II, or III. On May 14<sup>th</sup>, we are hosting a SBA Veterans' tune up event at our Harmony campus – 15 business counselors from all three SBDC's, Score, and the SBA will be on campus to provide free counseling to 30 Veteran business owners. We have 8 of our center's Veteran's businesses participating. Because of our past performance helping Veterans, we have secured SBA funding to give vets reduced fees. Instead of \$695 for SBM classes, Vets pay \$350. Vets pay \$150 versus \$495 for the Greenhouse class. The original SBA funding was for a three year period and ended December 31, 2012. With some lobbying from Michael Lainoff at the SBDC network and individual director efforts, we were able to extend funding from the SBA for 2013. Unless additional Veterans funding is secured at the Federal or State level, we will lose the ability to offer reduced fees after this year.

I would like to share what I have learned from my experience: as a student, an instructor, and now as the Director. Creating Veteran's support programs are not a 'Field of Dreams' business model. You can build them all you want but they will not come, especially when you think they would. Depending on military occupational specialty (MOS) and the amount of action seen, it takes a time to adjust and figure out how to reenter the mainstream. Some never make it but most do, but it takes time. Without determined outbound marketing and personal presentations, it is very difficult to get Veterans to sign up for anything – unless you are giving away money.

Unlike the times after Viet Nam, everyone is eager to help Veterans, including congress and state legislators. What everyone did not know at the time is how long it takes for reentry, so monies dedicated to help are running out about the time it is needed most. Our College and our center are an exception to the rule. We have been successful since our pilot VSBM class, and we continue to carry our reputation forward. It takes time to build programs and a reputation with people who need the support but are not ready for help. In my opinion, the best thing we all can do right now is help Veteran business owners create viable companies so they can hire more vets. The next best thing is help vets start their own business. Fortunately for me, I am in the business to do both.

I appreciate the opportunity to be with you today and would be happy to answer any questions if there are any. Thank You.