

OPERATION: START UP & GROW VETERANS BUSINESS CONFERENCE

MARCH 13, 2012

**Gordon Student Center
Onondaga Community College
Syracuse, NY**

8:45 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

Veterans and active members of the military wanting to start or grow their own business can register for the U.S. Small Business Administration's 5th Annual Business Conference for the Military Community, Operation: Start Up & Grow. The conference is Tuesday, March 13, from 8:45 a.m. to 1 p.m., at the Gordon Student Center of the Onondaga Community College. The free conference features speakers, workshops, networking and exhibitors, and is open to individuals with prior or current U.S. military service, including veterans, active duty, reservists and National Guard members.

Due to limited seating, registration is required by March 9. Online registration is available by visiting <http://www.sba.gov/operationstartup>. Contact the SBA to register by phone at 315-471-9393 or e-mail stephanie.ubowski@sba.gov.

This year's speakers include:

- Brian Bluff, U.S. Navy veteran - Brian Bluff is the President and co-founder of Site-Seeker, Inc., a full service internet marketing firm. Together with his brother and co-founder Eddie Bluff, Brian has grown the company into a successful source of search engine marketing and social media solutions, with offices and employees in four states. Before starting Site-Seeker, Bluff served four years as an officer in the U.S. Navy.
- Mary Warren, U.S. Air Force veteran – Mary Warren is President and founder of Black Horse Group, a full service design-build general contracting firm that excels at federal and state construction projects. Black Horse Group has successfully completed projects worth over \$4 million as a subcontractor and \$24 million as a prime contractor. Warren served four years as an engineering officer in the U.S. Air Force before launching her company.

Business financing, marketing and government contracting workshops will be offered at no cost. Veterans will have the opportunity to meet with exhibitors from 30 different agencies and organizations that provide veteran business programs and services.

The SBA and the Small Business Development Center at Onondaga Community College are hosting the event, with support from the Entrepreneurship Bootcamp for Veterans with Disabilities, Falcone Center at Syracuse University, M&T Bank, New York Business Development Corporation, New York Veteran Business Outreach Center, Onondaga Community College, the Tech Garden and the WISE Women's Business Center.

2012 Conference Interview With Veteran Entrepreneur Mary Warren

On March 13th at this year's Operation: Start Up & Grow veterans business conference, our event emcee will interview successful entrepreneur Mary Warren. Much like a TV talk show, the conversation will provide attendees the opportunity to learn how Mary transitioned her military experience into starting her successful small business. Mary will share her view of the risks and rewards, obstacles and opportunities that she handles on a daily basis as an entrepreneur. Don't miss out on this insightful interview at Onondaga Community College on March 13th!

"In 2005, I was working as a civilian for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and spent six months on a construction project in Afghanistan. While I was over there, on my down time I would sit and think how I was going to start my own business," recounted Mary Warren, a licensed professional engineer. "Starting a construction business is difficult especially if you don't have any money, credit to rent equipment, references or bonding. All those things were piled up against me."

The Long Island native had educational background in the industry, with a degree in mechanical engineering from the New York Institute of Technology. Warren spent four years serving in the U.S. Air Force as an environmental engineer at Mountain Home Air Force Base near Boise, Idaho. After her military service, Warren worked as a civil servant for the U.S. Army Public Works Engineering and Construction Division, OSHA and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Warren returned home from Afghanistan and then visited the Watertown Small Business Development Center, funded in part by the U.S. Small Business Administration, for free startup counseling sessions.

"They taught me the ABCs of starting a business, including business formation, how to write a business plan and different tax structures. They also gave me important contacts such as the regional PTAC (Procurement Technical Assistance Center). I found the PTAC was the best place for subcontracting opportunities and for networking with other companies," said Warren.

With a solid business plan, Warren found crucial support to launch her business from the Department of Defense's Mentor-Protégé Program (MPP). After many attempts, Warren successfully pitched her startup to an existing construction company that participated in the MPP. As the mentor, Structural Associates helped Ms. Warren with obtaining a line of credit, help establish bonding, provided non-competitive subcontract awards, and provided rented space in its Watertown office. Warren's time as a protégé allowed her startup company, Black Horse Group, to grow quickly from its sole-proprietor status to employ 35 people in just 18 months.

Today Ms. Warren employs eight managers and 30 to 50 field employees depending on the project. Black Horse Group has become a full-service design-build general contracting firm that excels at federal and state construction projects, successfully completing project worth over \$4 million as a subcontractor and \$24 million as a prime contractor. Projects range from \$400,000 building maintenance contracts for corporate clients to larger projects such as an \$11.8 million infrastructure upgrade contract, a \$6.5 million contract to build a 25,000-square-foot fire station, and a \$6.3 million contract for a 15,000-square-foot Child Development Center. Black Horse Group was also a joint-venture partner to build a 25,000-square-foot Child Development Center on Fort Drum.

Black Horse Group is currently working on the \$397,000 historical renovation of the Rock Island lighthouse in the St. Lawrence Seaway for the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. As part of a five year Multiple Task Order Award Contract (MATOC) for the Northeast region through the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Black Horse Group is currently building a 75,000-square-foot Training Support Center and a 4,000-square-foot storage building at Fort Drum. The design

includes adding a ground source heat pump geothermal system and upon completion, both buildings will earn the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED silver rating.

"My military experience really taught me how to manage resources, assets and people. I wanted to start my own company because I liked to build teams and I liked to build things. To anyone considering starting a business, I would say if you have the passion for something, go for it," said Ms. Warren.

2012 Keynote Speaker Veteran Entrepreneur Brian Bluff

Successful entrepreneur Brian Bluff will present the keynote address on veteran entrepreneurship at the 2012 conference. Brian Bluff is the President and co-founder of Site-Seeker, Inc., a full service internet marketing firm. Together with his brother and co-founder Eddie Bluff, vice president of key accounts, Brian has grown the company into a successful source of search engine marketing and social media solutions, with offices and employees in four states.

Prior to becoming an entrepreneur, Brian studied Micro-Electronic Engineering at the Rochester Institute of Technology. After earning his Bachelor's degree and spending several years in the United States Navy, Brian went on to work for some of the country's most successful companies including Pfizer, M&T Bank, and PAR Technology - where he held several Vice President positions, including Vice President of Marketing at Rome Research Corporation and Vice President/General Manager of PAR Logistics Management Systems. In 2000, Brian went on to start his first business, TCO Inc. As a provider of Internet marketing solutions, TCO, Inc. became one of the first of its kind in Central New York, offering clients a competitive advantage online through the use of consulting, online marketing, and the Thomas Industrial Network.

Today, Brian shares the secrets of Internet marketing on the national stage, traveling throughout the U.S. and Canada to speak at trade shows and seminars. Site-Seeker, Inc. is an Internet Marketing Firm specializing in SEO, SEM, social media, and web development, with a strong focus on the B2B and manufacturing arena. Site-Seeker, Inc. performs the efforts necessary to drive qualified visitors to its clients' websites; convert those visitors into buyers; measure the results achieved; and develop improvement plans based on performance.

Veteran-Owned Business Achievement 2011 Award Winner

In 1991, U.S. Navy veteran Al Nardslico and Ron Fishbeck started Systems Made Simple in Al's basement in Liverpool, NY. SMS has since grown into a multi-million dollar technology firm with offices in Syracuse NY and McLean VA and more than 140 employees deployed on customer contracts nationwide. In 2009, SMS was ranked # 310 on the Inc. 500 and in 2010, SMS ranked # 625 on the Inc. 5000 listing of the country's fastest-growing, privately held companies based on its impressive growth.

Built on a foundation of hard work and desire to exceed customer expectations, SMS has become a recognized leader in the IT Services field. SMS provides program management services, systems and software engineering, data management and integration services to Fortune 500 customers and federal agencies including Department of Veterans Affairs, Environmental Protection Agency, and General Services Administration.

SMS was selected as the 2011 Veteran-Owned Business Achievement Award winner for its dramatic growth in sales and employees and its proven ability to respond to adversity. The road to success hasn't always been easy-the economic impact of September 11, 2001 dramatically affected many small

businesses, including SMS. With help from a timely SBA loan, SMS was able to work through the economic down-turn and realize the great success which they are being recognized for in this award.

In December 2010, SMS was formally certified by the Department of Veterans Affairs, Center for Veterans Enterprise as a Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business. This certification enhances the company's ability to compete for government contracts. With new opportunities for growth on the horizon, including adding 20 new hires in March 2011, the future looks bright for SMS.

Giving back to the military and veteran community is important to SMS. The company's charitable support includes the Paralyzed Veterans of America, America's Freedom Festival, and the Fisher House charity, which provides a home environment for military families staying with an injured family member being treated at military health facilities.