



U.S. Small Business
Administration

Success Story

| BUFFALO DISTRICT

Release Date: Immediate

Contact: Kelly LoTempio, kelly.lotempio@sba.gov
Follow us on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [Blogs](#) & [Instagram](#)

From United States Army First Lieutenant to Veterinarian; Small Business Owner

SBA-Backed Paycheck Protection Program Loan Keeps Doors Open; Retains Staff

BUFFALO, NY – Mary Lee Fornes’ story of going from U.S. Army First Lieutenant to founding the Boston Valley Animal Hospital started in late 2008.

Fornes, a 30-year veteran of the U.S. Army Reserves, enlisted as a PFC in 1989. Fornes did military training in the Summers while attending veterinary school. After graduating from Cornell Veterinary School in 1993, she then commissioned as a Lieutenant in the Army Vet Corps. Fornes served in Bosnia and Iraq while part of the 402nd Civil Affairs Battalion. After returning home, Fornes decided to open her own practice.

“I wanted the benefits of being my own boss,” says Fornes. “I returned home where my Army friend, Terry McGuire led me to the United States Small Business Administration’s (SBA) resource partner the Small Business Development Center at Buffalo State College for assistance in starting up my own practice.”

Through direct counseling, the SBDC provides a wide range of management and technical assistance services.

“As a new business owner, I had to take a lot of time to learn about the business side of running a business,” said Fornes. “The assistance I received from SBDC allowed me to pull together a solid business plan and obtain an SBA-backed loan through M&T bank. The process was seamless and stress free.”

“Terry McGuire, the SBA Veteran Small Business Champion of the Year in 2009, said “after reviewing the SBA program and understanding risk management principles taught by M&T Bank Business Banker Deborah Di Matteo, I knew Dr. Fornes would be a great candidate to apply for this type of SBA loan package. To me, the strongest part of her application was her strong character and work ethic I observed while on deployment to Iraq in 2003.”

Boston Valley Animal Hospital is a women-owned, full-service veterinary hospital dedicated to advocating complete care of all animals they are entrusted with. Whether it is being met with a friendly face as you arrive at the hospital, receiving experienced advice and care during your visit, or when leaving your pet while you go on vacation BVAH strives to provide quality service for their clients and pets.

In March, like many other small businesses, the company was hit with the Coronavirus Pandemic. Fornes was faced with continuing operations as an essential business and keeping her employees on payroll.

As she faced these decisions, she knew she needed assistance financially. That is when she applied for an SBA-backed Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loan through M&T Bank.

“I applied and successfully received funding,” says Fornes. “The PPP funds I received are helping to keep my doors open and employees on the payroll. I was very happy with the application process through M&T Bank as well...it was easy, smooth and the service was excellent.”

After operating the hospital for over ten years, Fornes family-owned business has suffered a lot of blood, sweat and tears. Many of her family members who helped to build the hospital have now passed-away.

As small businesses brace for uncertainty, Fornes is planning for growth but at the same time her own exit strategy just a few years ahead.

“I want to continue to grow. My staff has grown, roles have reversed and my employees capable of running the show,” said Fornes. “Not a lot of people can say that, truly. But it’s also key when you’re looking ahead to the future.”

SBA is here to help small businesses overcome the challenges created by this health crisis. We offer multiple funding options for those seeking relief. As a reminder, PPP applications are being accepted through August 8.

The SBA also provides small business counseling and training through a variety of programs and resource partners. For more information, please contact your local SBA Buffalo district office at (716) 551-4301 or visit us online at sba.gov/ny/buffalo.

###