



News Release

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Environmental Remediation Company from Oklahoma Is National Small Business of the Year

State winners from Massachusetts and Hawaii are Runners-Up

WASHINGTON – A small business owner from Oklahoma City who battled a brain tumor and overcame challenges generated by 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina to lead her environmental remediation firm to success was today named *National Small Business Person of the Year*.

SBA Administrator Karen G. Mills made the announcement here during ceremonies at the U.S. Small Business Administration's celebration of National Small Business Week 2009.

"Jeanna Sellmeyer is a perfect example of the grit and determination it takes to become a highly successful entrepreneur in America today," said SBA Administrator Karen G. Mills. "Hers is a story of beating the odds and coming back on top, surviving daunting obstacles to lead her environmental remediation firm and its 100 employees to a leadership position in her industry."

"In doing so, Jeanna demonstrates the qualities that make small businesses such a powerful force in the American economy, and in their communities," said Mills.

First runner-up is Sumul Shah, president of Lumus Construction, a general, mechanical and electrical contractor in Woburn, Mass. The second runner-up is Vaughn Garner Akimeka Vasconcellos, president and CEO of Akimeka LLC, a provider of technical and medical information systems based in Kihei, Hawaii.

The National Small Business Person of the Year and runners-up were selected from among the 53 state small business winners, including the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and Guam, who are being honored this week in Washington, D.C., as part of National Small Business Week. The awards were announced at today's National Awards Dinner, sponsored by Sam's Club at the Mandarin Oriental Hotel.

The top winner, Jeanna Sellmeyer, 43, has led her company, the ASSET Group, Inc., to become one of the region's most successful federal construction and remediation contractors with just under 100 employees, more than \$45 million in revenues, and project locations from California to Florida.

An Oklahoma native, Sellmeyer founded ASSET in 1990 in California as an environmental remediation firm, providing asbestos, lead-based paint, hazardous materials and mold remediation services to private and commercial clients. While there, Sellmeyer was diagnosed

with a brain tumor. Overcoming the disease gave her a new sense of purpose and made her determined to expand the business through construction and federal contracting.

In 1999, the company became 8(a) certified as a minority- and woman-owned small business. On Sept. 11, 2001, the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington brought negotiations on the company's first federal contract to a halt, but a move to a newly established HUBZone back home in Oklahoma City led to new contract opportunities.

The company was well on its way when Hurricane Katrina struck and forced ASSET to reshape its vision. With new challenges came new opportunities, and the company was called upon to provide emergency services, including construction and remediation to FEMA, GSA and other federal agencies. In three days, the company hired 200 employees, deployed them to Mississippi, Louisiana and Alabama, and proceeded to complete \$13 million in aid contracts.

The first runner-up, Sumul Shah of Woburn, Mass., has excelled in the renovation and rehabilitation of historical landmarks, military construction, and urban development since 1998. In the 10 years since he started construction work, Lumus Construction has completed more than 400 contracts ranging in size from \$40,000 to \$6.4 million. As a minority-owned business, this entrepreneur also took advantage of the SBA's 8(a) Business Development program.

Lumus has 150 workers skilled at everything from design and engineering to plumbing and electrical work. The company earns \$30 million in annual revenues.

Vaughn Garner Akimeka Vasconcellos, president and CEO of Akimeka LLC, the second runner-up, had \$35,000 and a vision of creating a small business that could provide innovative information technology for the military medical industry. He established Akimeka in 1997, and immediately sought technical assistance from an SBA resource partner, the local Small Business Development Center, and SBA's 8(a) program, which provides business development and federal contract support to small disadvantaged businesses.

His company has grown from 20 employees in 2001 to 161 employees, with offices in Texas, Florida and Washington, D.C. He has sustained strong profitability and has grown revenues to almost \$20 million, with a 54 percent increase in the revenue base in the past five years.

The U.S. Small Business Administration thanks the cosponsors of National Small Business Week and related events: SCORE, Sam's Club, Symantec Corporation, Ford, Raytheon, Administaff, Visa, Sage, IBM, HP, Trend Micro, Lockheed Martin, Verio, Moran Media Group, D&B, Association of Small Business Development Centers (ASBDC), National Association of Development Companies (NADCO), National Association of Government Guaranteed Lenders (NAGGL), National Small Business Association (NSBA), Small Business Entrepreneurship Council (SBEC), Women Impacting Public Policy (WIPP), and National Association for the Self-Employed (NASE)

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