



News Release

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North Carolina Health Care Company Owned by Native American Sisters is National Small Business of the Year

State winners from Illinois and North Dakota are Runners-Up

WASHINGTON – A pair of Native American sisters from Lumberton, N.C., who dreamt of turning their health care experience into a thriving homegrown business – Bobbie Jacobs-Ghaffar and Lesa Jacobs – were today named *National Small Business Persons of the Year* during ceremonies at SBA Small Business Week 2007, the agency's two-day conference marking National Small Business Week.

"Bobbie Jacobs-Ghaffar and Lesa Jacobs epitomize the hard work, the risk-taking, and the creativity that are the characteristics of successful American entrepreneurs," said SBA Administrator Steven C. Preston. "These are the qualities that make small businesses such a powerful force in the American economy, and these are the qualities that make Bobbie and Lesa the National Small Business Persons of the Year. Their company, Native Angels Home Care and Hospice, embodies the best of entrepreneurship, citizenship and the American dream."

First runner-up is Jay Johnson, president of Johnson Grain in Waverly, Ill. Second runner-up is Dave McFarlane, president of McFarlane Sheet Metal of Grand Forks, N.D.

Also announced today was the winner of the National SCORE Chapter of the Year, the Fairfield County Chapter 41 of Norwalk, Conn. The chapter's more than 45 volunteer professionals counseled more than 3,000 private sessions, a 39 percent increase over 2005, and attendance at the chapter's small business workshops rose by 56 percent, according to Chapter Chair Elliot Baritz.

Bobbie Jacobs-Ghaffar and Lesa Jacobs, sisters and members of the Lumbee Indian Tribe, took their combined 40 years health care experience and launched a homegrown healthcare business in 2000. At the start, they had only one cell phone, two patients and a certified nursing assistant. Today, Native Angels Homecare and Hospice provides a broad range of services, employing 301 professionals and serving 760 patients daily, with annual sales over \$9 million.

The company provides "a full spectrum of holistic healthcare" and aims to "empower individuals in our community to make informed health decisions that will have a positive impact on the quality of their lives and their family's lives." A new \$7.2 million headquarters building is being financed with an SBA 504 loan. The facility in Lumberton will include a 24-hour child care center, an urgent care center, a full service cafeteria, gift shop, pharmacy and a 110,000-square-foot regional youth sports complex.

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Jay Johnson, the first runner-up, learned enough about the grain business from his father, Robert Johnson, to convince him to spend his life in the grain trade. After graduating from college and working in Chicago, he returned to the growing family business, witnessing sales growth to more than 9 million bushels of corn per year. They bought two small grain elevators in nearby towns, and their truck fleet grew from three to 18, hauling area farmers' corn to the Mississippi River for transport.

But a downturn in corn and increasing transport problems hurt the company badly in 2002, leading Johnson to re-write the company's business plan, switching most transport to rail. With the help of a \$1.3 million SBA Certified Development Company loan, Johnson Grain built a highly mechanized and computerized grain elevator facility in Waverly, Ill. As a result, the company's total output has risen to 62 million bushels of grain from producers in Central Illinois to feedlots and markets in Texas (60 percent) and Mexico (40 percent).

Second runner-up Dave McFarlane first worked part-time at the family-owned McFarlane Sheet Metal in Grand Forks, while still in high school, sweeping up and offering an extra hand on small projects. He later joined the 20-year-old company full time in 1979, and bought the company when his father retired two years later.

McFarlane's chemical engineering background enabled the firm to pursue HVAC applications requiring specialized engineering techniques, computerized technology, specialty metals and complex building ventilation systems. The company's experience also allowed it to increase sales in repair and rehabilitation of complex buildings. Now, as the company has evolved beyond being a purely local contractor, its typical projects range up to more than \$1.5 million, and annual sales have increased from \$220,000 to more than \$7 million.

The national small business awards are a highlight of SBA Small Business Week, the agency's annual celebration honoring the nation's leading small business entrepreneurs, co-sponsored by SCORE, "Counselors to America's Small Business."

The winners are selected on their record of stability, growth in employment and sales, financial condition, innovation, response to adversity and community service. For more information on these companies and on the rest of the state Small Business Person of the Year award winners, visit the SBA Web site at <http://www.sba.gov/sbw>. The Web site also includes additional information on Small Business Week 2007, including information on all award winners.

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Small Business Week 2007 is cosponsored by the following organizations: SCORE, Sam's Club, IBM, BAE Systems, MasterCard, Raytheon, Orbitz, National Association for the Self-Employed, National Association of Small Business Investment Companies, Association of Small Business Development Centers, Small Business and Entrepreneurship Council, National Association of Women Business Owners, Women Impacting Public Policy, Lowes, and National Association of Government Guaranteed Lenders.

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