

Getting down to business with the government

Assistance program helps businesses cut through the red tape

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LANCASTER - Many local business owners have products and goods the government would contract to buy.

But the amount of paperwork and technical jargon often keeps business owners from even making it to the discussion rounds with the government.

The Southwest Central Ohio Procurement Technical Assistance Center makes connecting with local, state and federal governments easier.

The organization helps Ohio's small, minority, women-owned, veteran-owned and disadvantaged businesses cut through the red tape of sealing a government contract.

PTAC is helping small businesswoman Diana Spurgus discover the opportunities available for her business. Spurgus is the co-owner of Business System Solutions, which is a Microsoft-certified partner. The company installs and maintains computer systems.

Spurgus is one of 11 local clients who has used PTAC's resources since a satellite office opened in Lancaster in October.

"My experience with them has been wonderful. They're such a helpful group of people who are really interested in promoting businesses amongst government (entities)," Spurgus said.

"I wasn't thinking that an organization of our size - with less than 10 employees - could procure at those levels," she said. "I'm finding out there are opportunities. You just have to work your way through a myriad of processes to get there."

Spurgus was surprised to find a small business like hers could have selling power at the state and federal level. Spurgus has yet to secure a government contract, but she has had several leads.

"They understand the procedures and complications people go through," she said. "They may not always know the answers, but one nice thing about them is they take the time to find the answers. So instead of me having to call 15 agencies, they will do the footwork for me, which saves me a lot of time."

BENEFITS OF PTAC

The local site is part of a nationwide network of procurement experts who help business owners navigate the requirements of getting and fulfilling government contracts.

The Southwest Central Ohio PTAC, which is based in Dayton, serves 33 counties and recently opened a satellite office in Pickerington. It is monitored by the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA), a U.S. Department of Defense agency.

Offices in Fairfield County are operated by PTAC staff at the Pickerington Area and Lancaster Fairfield County Chamber of Commerce sites.

PTAC is there to walk its clients through the paperwork process so that what seemed impossible becomes possible, said Mel Farnsley, procurement administrator for the Southwest Central Ohio PTAC.

The organization's clientele ranges from T-shirt manufacturers and janitorial services to communications and hi-tech clients.

"The variety of clients is what keeps it interesting," Farnsley said. "One day, we're dealing with someone who sews bags for the Army and the next day (we're dealing) with someone who does nano-technology."

Securing a contract can take anywhere from six months to two years, Farnsley said.

"I have had people come to orientation gung-ho, get their paperwork in and really make it happen in two months," she said. "That's not unheard of, but we try to keep it realistic for folks because it's the government. If it wasn't, you wouldn't need PTAC."

One of PTAC's services includes bid-matching. Clients receive daily updates on bids that match specific keywords for their products.

"When they get bids they want, they call their PTAC counselor and let them know and we'll walk them through that," Farnsley said. "Once they get the bid, they call us ... and then we're doing a little happy dance. But it doesn't stop there. We continue to walk them through step by step. We stay with them through the 'Now what?' "

MAKING THE CONNECTION

Businesses seeking services from PTAC must be in operation for at least two years, with the exception of inventors. Services provided by PTAC are free except for the orientation events.

The orientations serve as the starting point for interested business owners to build relationships with PTAC.

Pickerington's satellite office opened in June so this will be the first opportunity for chamber members to see what PTAC has to offer them.

"I've gone to one of the orientations, and I just think it's a golden opportunity," said Pickerington Area Chamber of Commerce President Helen Mayle. "I hope every one of my Chamber members will take advantage of it."

The economic impact for businesses that secure government contracts can mean expanding a business and adding new employees, said Chris Agnitsch, president of the Lancaster-Fairfield County Chamber of Commerce.

"The impact for each company will vary, but peoples' outcomes will come on how hard they're willing to work and staying with it," Agnitsch said.

The program is an outstanding example of the state's tax dollars at work, said State Rep. Tim Schaffer.

"For every tax dollar invested in this program, the current return on that investment back to the private economy is at least \$1,400," Schaffer said. "That's a \$1,400 to one investment for Fairfield County taxpayers.

Schaffer was instrumental in helping set up the satellite offices in Fairfield County. He said it made a lot of sense to make PTAC's resources available to local businesses.

"This is a benefit from the state of Ohio that not every county has," he said. "I don't know why not all the legislators are doing this with their counties, but when I saw this I thought it was a perfect fit for our local chambers ... and they both embraced it."

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Diana Spurgus, co-owner of Business System Solutions, poses in her office. Spurgus' business is receiving help from the Southwest Central Ohio Procurement Technical Assistance Center to trudge through the red tape and paperwork involved in working on government contracts. E-G photo by Ken Ritchie

If you go

- **WHAT:** Southwest Central Ohio Procurement Technical Assistance Program: New Client Orientation
- **WHEN:** 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Aug. 11; Registration begins at 9:30 a.m.
- **WHERE:** Towne Hall Banquet Center, 25 N. Center St., Pickerington
- **COST:** \$45
- **FOR MORE INFORMATION:** call Mel Farnsley at 937-259-1368.

About PTAC

The Southwest Central Ohio Procurement Technical Assistance Center helps Ohio's small, minority, women-owned, veteran-owned and disadvantaged businesses sell goods and services to local, state and federal governments.

For more information about the Southwest Central Ohio Procurement Technical Assistance Center's satellite offices in Lancaster and Pickerington call 937-259-1368; or contact the local Chamber offices:

- Lancaster Fairfield County Chamber of Commerce: 740-653-8251
- Pickerington Area Chamber of Commerce: 614-837-1958

For more information about PTAC, visit www.dayptac.org