

## BUSINESS CENTER PROFILE: DC/MD/VA

### Building Wealth and Contributing to “Better Lives”

**W**ashington DC MBDA Business Center is one of four serving the Baltimore and Washington, DC metropolitan area MBEs. Project Director Michael Bing is new to the Washington DC MBDA Business Center, which under his leadership, has thrived since his arrival in 2013. Mr. Bing was picked for the DC Center because of his exceptional ability to create long-lasting client partnerships, and his vast network of resources.

Within months, Bing developed and successfully launched a peer-to-peer business development cost-share program that creates portfolios consisting of no more than five firms that vary in size, but offer similar services based on their North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) Codes. Teams are also developed to ensure that member firms have differentiators, such as varying certifications (minority-, woman-, veteran-owned, and HUBZone), making them eligible for more contracting opportunities when paired with one or more firms on their team. Each team is assigned to the same business development specialist, who ensures that each firm is provided with a specific number of pre-vetted opportunities, along with customized consulting services and assistance with capture management, business development, procurement assistance, access to sources of capital, proposal development services, and more.

The Washington DC MBDA Business Center team prides itself on its holistic approach to business development. Before taking on a new client, they go in as a team and conduct a comprehensive analysis that includes researching the firm, their competition, and the regional industry outlook. A potential client is not confirmed until the team is certain that there are solid opportunities and that they can contribute to the firm's growth and expansion. The Center also takes into consideration its strengths and industry breakdown of their client portfolio—15 percent construction, 75 percent technology, and the remaining 10 percent made up of multiple industries.

Under the guidance of Michael Bing, the DC MBDA Business Center is positioned for continuous success as demonstrated by client, Saundra Thurman-Custis, owner of Crystal Enterprises. In FY 2013, the DC Center helped this firm to secure \$31 million in contracts, which enabled the creation of 41 new jobs and the retention of 30 existing employees.<sup>1</sup>



Michael Bing, project director, Washington DC MBDA Business Center



Saundra Thurman-Custis, Owner, Crystal Enterprises



<sup>1</sup>Contracts, financial transactions, and jobs created/retained are verified by MBDA headquarters staff. MBDA performance data is maintained in the Agency's CRM database and was retrieved for this report on December 17, 2013.

## Crystal Enterprises

Saundra Thurman-Custis started *Crystal Enterprises* in 1989 as an executive maid service that specialized in private residences. She was successful as evidenced by her client list which included dignitaries and key political figures, but things changed significantly after she was awarded her first Federal Government contract to provide cleaning services for a dining facility in 2000. She provided such exceptional service and management oversight that she was invited to bid on a contract to manage the entire facility.

When Ms. Thurman-Custis first sought assistance from the Washington DC MBDA Business Center in 2009, Crystal Enterprises was averaging \$500,000 in annual revenue.<sup>13</sup> Ms. Thurman-Custis felt that it was essential to seek help with marketing her firm in order to win larger contracts. With the support of MBDA, Crystal Enterprises has increased its revenue to over \$11 million, and now has 300 employees.<sup>13</sup> According to Ms. Thurman-Custis, MBDA helped her remove “false barriers to market entry” that were preventing her company from growing. Her first line of credit came with MBDA assistance and when the firm needed bonding, MBDA helped her secure it within 24 hours. At the recommendation of the Washington DC MBDA Business Center, Thurman-Custis entered into a joint venture and landed a facilities maintenance and landscaping contract with a federal museum in Washington, DC; and a nutrition care contract for three of the largest hospitals in the country. These are just two examples of the types of contracts she has won with the help of the Washington DC MBDA Business Center. The DC Center also helped secure a contract to provide food and facilities management services, facilities maintenance for a newly constructed Federal Government training and conference facility in Harper’s Ferry, West Virginia. Most recently, Crystal Enterprises learned of an overseas contracting opportunity but was not considering bidding until contacting MBDA Business Center Project Director Michael Bing, who arranged for an overseas agent to help close the deal.

Ms. Thurman-Custis attributes much of her success to her ability to lead people. She finds the best employees and creates environments for them to thrive. This is evidenced by two of her employees—Christopher Brooks and Melba Norris, who praise her for their rewarding careers and ability to thrive as members of the Crystal Enterprises family.

### Crystal Enterprises Employees: Christopher Brooks

Christopher Brooks has been an employee of Crystal Enterprises for just over five years. After a career in hotel restaurant management, Brooks wanted to work for a company where he could make a difference—a minority-owned business. Hearing that Crystal Enterprises had a practice of “finding the right people for the right solutions,” he approached Saundra Thurman-Custis, owner and CEO, to see if there was a place for him. After 21 years in the restaurant business, he knew immediately that his future was with Crystal Enterprises. Brooks is gifted in the culinary arts and a stellar team builder, who is currently training staff for one of the firm’s newest contracts in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia.

Mr. Brooks is project manager for a Crystal Enterprises contract in Sykesville, Maryland, where he directs a robust cafeteria and catering operation for a law enforcement training institute. He was recently recognized as Crystal Enterprises’ Employee of the Year and rewarded with a one-week paid vacation for two at any resort in the world. Mr. Brooks chose an upscale resort in Aruba and will travel with his wife in the summer of 2014.



Christopher Brooks, project manager

### Melba Norris

Melba Norris, human resources manager, began her career with Crystal Enterprises working on special projects in her spare time while working full time for the state of Maryland. As a single mother, Ms. Norris took on the extra work with the goal of moving to the suburbs in time for her 5-year old son to

start school. It did not take long for Crystal Enterprises to realize that Norris was an asset to the firm; or for Norris to realize that her career goals could be fulfilled as a member of the Crystal Enterprises family. Ms. Norris and her son, Jeremiah recently moved to their new home in Landover, Maryland and are planning a summer adventure before Jeremiah starts first grade in the fall.



Melba Norris, human resources manager, and son, Jeremiah

<sup>13</sup>Interview with Saundra Thurman-Custis, owner, Crystal Enterprises.” Personal interview. April 4, 2014.