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Dawn Dearborn
Owner, TANTARA Corp. of Worcester
CEO ONE ON ONE

Dawn Dearborn is owner and project director at TANTARA Corp., a company that provides construction, demolition and remediation services. In business since February 2000, the company has grown to 20 to 25 employees, depending on the season, and has landed multimillion-dollar contracts with the U.S. Department of Defense. Ms. Dearborn was raised in Acton and earned a bachelor's degree in management from California Coast University.

How did you get started in this business?

"I started on the financial side of the business, working for a national environmental engineering firm. I was the 12th person hired. I was with the company until it grew to almost 500 employees. I learned a lot and left (as) an officer of the company."

Why did you decide to open your own business in this industry?

"My experience had been in the environmental field, and I enjoy the work that we do."

You recently got a \$4 million contract with the Navy for site preparation and demolition from New York to Maine as part of an initiative by the U.S. Small Business Administration to increase federal opportunities for women-owned businesses. What are your thoughts on the efforts that are specifically targeted at women-owned businesses?

"I'm happy that Congress enacted the law for the woman-owned business set-aside. The law had been discussed in Congress for more than a decade, I believe. I hope it will have a dramatic effect on the future success of other woman-owned businesses around the country."

Have you had challenges due either to being a woman in this field or running your own company in it?

"Absolutely. TANTARA is a woman-owned business in a business sector that is dominated by male-owned businesses. There have been challenges in getting our foot in the door, but I think that is true of all businesses starting out. We persevered, and when we did get opportunities we did what was asked of us, and then always a bit more. We take pride in our work, and if we can save our clients money we do so. We have old-fashioned values and ethics, which I contend have served us well, especially in this economy. We work for great clients and we have a great team of individuals working at TANTARA. We're very fortunate."

What are those challenges?

"The same sorts of things that you might imagine. It's hard to break in and establish yourself and make new relationships. It's hard to gain credibility and to get opportunities. You just have to persevere."

You've already done work for the Air National Guard and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. What does it mean to you and the company to have landed this latest federal contract? How does it compare with others you've had?

"It's very exciting to win this contract with the Navy. We are working with all branches of the Department of Defense right now. We have had additional significant contracts awarded by the Corps of Engineers in several districts in the past 15 months. For example, we are currently working at the Cape Canaveral Air Force Station and Patrick Air Force Base in Florida. We are remediating space launch complexes where NASA used to launch rockets. Occasionally, work is halted there for rocket launches. It's very exciting to work there and get this experience. We recently won a \$10 million Multiple Award Remediation contract from the Corps of Engineers and are also completing \$7 million worth of work at Cape Canaveral Air Force Station for them."

When your company does work in other parts of the country, are you sending workers from your Worcester

base?

"Yes, to begin a project and often to manage it. We supplement with local labor when we can once a project is under way."

What are your favorite projects to work on?

"The challenging ones. The ones where we learn something."

What are your plans for the future of TANTARA?

"To keep growing! We are actively looking for new staff. We have a great set of people working at TANTARA now. I am really proud of them all. We want to build on that by hiring more people that share our philosophy. The goal is to keep working hard and winning more work."

Compiled by Jacquelyn Gutc

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