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Two Charleston men win statewide small business awards

The Small Business Administration (SBA) is recognizing two Charleston men as 2009 SBA award winners. Robert "Bob" Meddick, Deputy of Small Business Programs at Space and Naval Warfare Systems Command (SPAWAR) -- Systems Center Atlantic in Hanahan, is the 2009 Minority Small Business Champion of the Year for South Carolina. Noah Leask, president and CEO of ISHPI Information Technologies, Inc., is the 2009 Veteran Small Business Champion of the Year for both South Carolina and the eight-state southeast region. Both Leask and Meddick will be honored in Columbia on Wednesday, April 29, as part of the state's sixth annual Salute to Small Business.

Meddick has worked at SPAWAR since 1999, assuming his current position in 2007. Under Meddick's guidance, SPAWAR awarded 3,350 contracts to small minority-owned businesses near the end of fiscal year 2008 for a total of \$242 million -- 10.6 percent of the total dollar amount of all contracts and more than double the Department of Defense goal of 5 percent. From fiscal year 2007 to fiscal year 2008, the number of contracts to minority-owned firms increased by more than eight percent, and dollars expended by nearly 15 percent. And in partnership with the Charleston Defense Contractors Association, Meddick hosts a quarterly symposium to educate small firms that support SPAWAR's mission on contracting with the agency. Each symposium attracts about 150 contractors.

Meddick's dedication to empowering minority-owned businesses extends beyond his workplace. He regularly partners with the Charleston area Small Business Development Center, SCORE and the South Carolina Women's Business Center to counsel their clients. He works with minority small business clients on a case by case basis to help them with start-up and alternative marketing strategies and, of course, to access government contracting opportunities.

One of many minority small business owners helped by Meddick is Noah Leask, a Native American from the Sault Ste. Marie tribe of Chippewa Indians and the Veteran Small Business Champion of the Year.

Leask, a service-disabled veteran, understands the diverse talents and unique work ethic veterans bring to the business sphere. He started his own small business ISHPI in September 2006. ISHPI draws upon Leask's experience as a Navy cryptologist to provide services -- which include information warfare, cyber-security and logistics support -- to federal agencies and private entities that make up the defense and intelligence communities. 95 percent of ISHPI's employees are veterans, who bring skills learned on the front lines of Operations Enduring Freedom, Iraqi Freedom, Desert Storm and Southern Watch.

Not content to merely set an example of the vital role veterans can play in the U.S. economy, Leask is an advocate of veteran-owned small businesses. He gives start-up business counseling to veterans and promotes the benefits to federal agencies, including SPAWAR, of awarding contracts to veteran-owned small businesses.

All SBA programs and services are provided on a non-discriminatory basis.

Leask actively seeks other veteran-owned businesses to work with ISHPI on contracting opportunities. Currently, ISHPI is building a team of service-disabled veteran-owned businesses to compete for a \$1.5 billion Homeland Security contract. And right now, ISHPI only uses subcontractors that are veteran-owned companies.

Meddick lives in Mount Pleasant with wife Kathleen, a nurse. He was nominated by Sandy Davidson of the USC Small Business Development Center in Charleston. Leask lives in Mount Pleasant with his wife Lisa, a former Naval Officer, and their three children. He was nominated by Col. R. Todd Dombroski, surgeon for the Joint IED Defeat Organization in Crystal City, Va.