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Three Small Business Champions Show Persistence Prevails in Government Contracting

American Express OPEN Recognizes Three Small Business Owners for Government Contracting Success with Victory in Procurement (VIP) Awards at Washington, D.C. Event

Washington, DC – June 15, 2012 – Today American Express OPEN[®], the small business division of the financial services company, recognized three small business owners for their outstanding achievements in government contracting during the third annual Victory in Procurement (VIP) Awards. The awards ceremony took place at the “Victory in Procurement: Grow Your Business through Government Contracting” event in Washington, D.C.

”For government contractors, the expression ‘if at first you don’t succeed, try, try again’ has become their mantra. According to an American Express OPEN survey, small business contractors said it took an average of 4.4 bids before they won their first contract,” said Alex Ytuarte, senior manager of customer advocacy at American Express OPEN. “These three small businesses exemplify that despite a more competitive environment, determination and tenacity do pay off. Their individual stories inspire other business owners to find growth and success by selling to the government.”

At today’s event, roughly 700 small businesses learned about current legislation affecting government contractors, teaming best practices, how to write powerful capabilities statements and how to master the General Services Administration (GSA) Schedule through interactive workshops and panel discussions. Approximately 250 business owners met one-on-one with federal, state and local government buyers and large prime contractors. Procurement officials from Lockheed Martin, National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and the U.S. Department of Energy are just some of the 40 buyers that met and shared the more than \$120 million in contract opportunities with business owners.

Also at the event, three small business owners were recognized in the categories of Government Contractor of the Year, Woman Contractor of the Year and Teaming Contractor of the Year. Candidates provided detailed information about their work and success in government contracting, and the applications were evaluated by a panel of judges.

The 2012 winners are:

- **Government Contractor of the Year** was awarded to **Amber Peebles** of Dumfries, VA-based **Athena Construction Group**, a general contractor and construction management company specializing in light commercial and federal construction. Athena Construction Group had a rough start when it was founded in 2003 when faced with significant financial losses during a difficult economic period. The company took bold

and decisive action. Through persistence, and by getting certified as a Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Business, Woman-Owned Business, and Historically Underutilized Business Zone construction company, Athena Construction Group was able to obtain work by sub-contracting, prime contracting and teaming. The company has been able to grow through the recession and hire new employees. Ninety percent of Athena Construction Group's revenues are generated through government contracts, and 2012 revenues are projected to increase by roughly 23% over 2011.

- **Teaming Contractor of the Year** was awarded to **Ron Perry** of Anchorage, AK-based **Teya Technologies**, an Alaska Native-owned 8(a) certified Small Disadvantaged Business which provides professional services to government and commercial clients. The company's story is one that all small businesses can relate to. After working long hours, starting with very little investment, and asking others for advice, Teya Technologies is now on track for continued success. Since entering the government contracting arena, the company has gained past performance experience as a subcontractor and is now the prime contractor on roughly 90% of their projects. The company anticipates roughly 300% revenue growth this year and attributes its success to government contracting, specifically partnering and teaming.
- **Woman Contractor of the Year** was awarded to **Necole Parker** of Washington, DC-based, **The ELOCEN Group**, a woman-owned 8(a) certified Small Disadvantaged Business specializing in program and construction management services. By carving out the time and finding a successful niche within government contracting – which makes up 85% of the company's revenues – The ELOCEN Group has been able to obtain several multiple-year contracts and complete in excess of 20 projects, totaling more than 12 million square feet of managed new construction and renovation space. The level of success the company has achieved has come from its proactivity and ability to consistently translate clients' needs into realizable solutions. They adhere to the motto "Satisfied Customers, become Satisfied Clients for Life!" Between 2009 and 2011 respectively, the company exceeded projected revenue growth expectations by more than tenfold, and 2012 revenues are on pace to increase by another 30%. The business recently expanded its operations to Atlanta based upon their need and ability to significantly impact the region.

The VIP awards are part of American Express OPEN's Victory in Procurement™ (VIP) for Small Business initiative. Launched in 2009, VIP is a national program that helps small businesses of all kinds capitalize on the enormous growth opportunity provided through government contracts.

About American Express OPEN

American Express OPEN is the leading payment card issuer for small businesses in the United States and supports business owners with products and services to help them run and grow their businesses. This includes business charge and credit cards that deliver purchasing power, flexibility, rewards, savings on business services from an expanded lineup of partners and online tools and services designed to help improve profitability. Learn more at www.OPEN.com and connect with us at openforum.com and twitter.com/openforum.

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