

VETREPRENEUR[®]

OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF NaVOBA

JANUARY 2008

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LARRY BROUGHTON**
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Name: Dennis Fontana
Company Name: Sentry Box Services, LLC
Year Founded: 2004
Location: Columbia, South Carolina
2006 Revenue: \$2.7 million
of Employees: 11, but as many as 52 in summer
Web site: www.sentry-box.com
Age: 61
Service Branch: U.S. Army, 1969 - 1998
Words of Advice: "One, pay attention to detail as to how you deal with your vendors and subcontractors. Always pay them on time and take care of them. It pays off. Two, I really recommend that you have a third-party audit of your financials. Hire a CPA to verify all the numbers are correct and take care of accounting glitches. It's a very good tool when you're dealing with banks and other businesses."
NaVOBA Member Since: 2007



Dennis Fontana

A RETIRED COLONEL with just shy of 30 years of service and a master's degree in civil engineering, Fontana spent much of his last eight years in the Army in facilities maintenance and construction. He turned those skills into a Sentry Box Services, an VOB specializing in base operations support and maintenance with a motto that Fontana takes very seriously: "Under-advertise and over-deliver."

That practice helped Sentry Box Services be profitable from its very first month, and helped the 60-year-old Fontana build it from start-up to a \$3 million company in less than four years, with a strong record of performance (nominated for subcontractor of the year at Fort Jackson, S.C.) and safety.

The key? Customer relations that is personal and immediate.

"There's no word in the vocabulary to describe how valuable customer relations is," Fontana said. "If there's a problem, we ride to the sound of the bugle. We get up there and we take care of it."

He drove 500 miles each way to clear up a misunderstanding at Andrews Air Force Base. ("My credibility went right off the charts," he said.) And when there isn't a problem, Fontana works hard to prevent one by checking in with the right people on the ground.

"The very first job we did as a prime, at a Marine Corps Reserve

Center in Charleston S.C., I went back three months later to check in and ask if it was still good," he said. "The CO (Commanding Officer) said he'd never had a contractor come back before."

In the Army, Fontana was director of public works for two major installations, covering everything from engineering design and construction to renovations and repairs, grounds maintenance, railroads, utilities, master planning and fire protection.

Fontana started the business in 2004, after spending several years as a vice president at Kira Facilities Maintenance & Construction, a major prime contractor. Sentry Box Services got started as a subcontractor for Kira but soon won prime contracts of its own. Today, the company works regularly at 16 locations in six states and has completed projects for the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force and VA, among others.

Fontana's proud of the company's growth, as well as his ability to provide medical benefits and a 401(k) plan to his employees. He's also proud of the company's record for safety.

"We proved ourselves to provide cost effective, responsive services, and we showed that we could do the job," Fontana said. "Do that and you can be successful." •



Michael Guervremont

EXECUTIVE PROTECTION SYSTEMS started in a 10-foot by 12-foot office, cramped quarters with two employees, a couple of desks, and a folding plastic table with four chairs forming a makeshift conference room.

Six years later, in August, the emergency preparedness and logistics company ranked No. 172 on *Inc.* magazine's list of the fastest-growing private companies in the U.S., with three year sales growth of nearly 1,200% and 2006 revenues of more than \$20 million.

"It's been explosive," said CEO Michael Guervremont, a 41-year-old service-disabled, retired sergeant first class who spent 13 years in the Army, through 1997. "We've found our niche, and it's something we can proud of, which is exciting."

EPS is in the business of saving lives. The company's growth has been built on being the country's leading provider of escape hoods, civilian gas masks, and systems that provide protection in disasters

and WMD attacks. But EPS is much more than that, providing services including training, logistics, emergency preparedness and communications continuity, with what Guervremont describes as "Presidential-level" service.

That's no idle boast. As a soldier, he worked in the White House's military office on Presidential communications, emergency communications, and logistics. Nearly half of his employees are veterans.

"It's the highest possible level of quality and service," Guervremont said. "There's no room for failure. It's has to be perfect every time, and there are a lot of redundancies. We carry that level of service and apply them to communications, logistics, all the things that make a business solid."

EPS includes a safety showroom store for emergency equipment, a communications group, and an operations group that handles inventory, management and logistics of emergency equipment.