



Press Release

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## Disabled Veteran-Owned Firms Land Contracts with High-Speed Rail

SACRAMENTO, Calif. – In honor of Veterans Day, the California High-Speed Rail Authority (Authority) is paying tribute to the men and women of the military, especially those disabled veterans who own small businesses that are working on high-speed rail. Currently, there are 28 Disabled Veteran Business Enterprises (DVBE) committed to the high-speed rail program statewide. Today, the Authority is highlighting four of those firms that call California home.

- The 111<sup>th</sup> Aerial Photography Squadron, based in San Martin specializes in aerial video and photography and has been conducting fly-overs to take photos of the progress on Construction Package 1, which runs 29 miles from Madera to Fresno.
- G&C Equipment Corporation, a Gardena-based firm in business for over 33 years, will supply steel, lumber and concrete forms for high-speed rail.
- Ecotech Resources, Inc., located in Berkeley, conducts environmental site studies for right-of-way property appraisals. Owner Jeffrey Root said “Because of high-speed rail, I was able to hire three contractors.”
- Petra Resource Management out of San Diego is providing archeological services in Native American tribal areas. The company is working along the proposed high-speed rail alignment between Los Angeles and San Diego.

The Authority Board of Directors is keenly aware of the need to help small businesses, especially those firms that are owned by or employ veterans. Board Vice-Chairs Jim Hartnett and Tom Richards, as well as Board members Mike Rossi and Patrick Henning, Sr., are all military veterans.

“My heart swells with pride when I think about the business opportunities high-speed rail is providing for veterans,” Hartnett said. “Starting a business can be especially challenging for disabled veterans who are returning from active duty and reintegrating into civilian life. I’m glad high-speed rail is there to give those who are interested an opportunity for much-needed work.”

In honor of Veterans Day last year, the Authority signed a Strategic Partnership Agreement with the California Department of Veterans Affairs to share services and resources and to make sure firms that are certified as disabled veteran-owned get information about high-speed rail and how they can join the program. You can view the agreement at: [http://www.hsr.ca.gov/docs/about/partnerships/cooperative/Partnership\\_Agreement\\_CalVet\\_2013.pdf](http://www.hsr.ca.gov/docs/about/partnerships/cooperative/Partnership_Agreement_CalVet_2013.pdf)

The Authority has an aggressive Small Business Program which calls for a 30 percent goal for small business participation which includes a three percent goal for DVBE and a 10 percent goal for Disadvantaged Business Enterprises (DBE) and Micro-Businesses (MB).

To learn more about the firms featured in this press release, please read the attached profiles.

## 111<sup>th</sup> Aerial Photography Squadron



Lt. Colonel Pat Belanger, a retired fighter pilot and decorated veteran, is proud of his military service. He served in the Air National Guard's 144<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing, based out of Fresno, where he flew six different fighter jets, including the F-16, and racked up nearly 16,000 hours of flight time.

He carried his military experience forward into an aerial photography business, the 111<sup>th</sup> Aerial Photography Squadron, which is a certified DVBE.

"I earned my company's DVBE status through hard work, dedication and a duty to serve my country," Belanger said. "It's opened doors and generated opportunities for my business that weren't within reach until now."

The 111<sup>th</sup> Squadron has five employees: Belanger and his wife, Julie, two full-time and one part-time employee. But they often cover large areas of land when they do aerial photography and mapping for various industries and agencies.

"The high-speed rail project is by far the largest and longest duration project that we've been involved with," Belanger explained. "We had to acquire new equipment and develop new techniques to follow the new rail bed for a continuous 29 miles."

He's also grateful for agencies like the Authority and other organizations that promote the use of veteran-owned businesses. "They help connect businesses that want to work with veterans, especially those who have often struggled to carve out their niche in the civilian workforce."

Over the years, Belanger has networked with contacts around the world to set-up aerial photography shoots. When it comes to flying over the high-speed rail line in the Central Valley he said, "I love the challenge and I'm very proud that my company's aerial photography will chronicle one of the largest transportation projects in California history. He added, "None of this would have happened without my DVBE status and the high-speed rail project."

## G&C Corporation



He laughed as he remembered having a shoeshine stand in Birmingham, Alabama at age 12. “Ever since I was eight years old, I wanted to be my own boss,” recalled Gene Hale. “When I opened the shoeshine stand, I had to get a business license and pay taxes.”

For the last 33 years, Hale has run G&C Equipment Corporation, a certified DVBE that sells and leases construction equipment, materials and supplies. Last June, Hale landed a contract to work on the high-speed rail program in the Central Valley.

Hale, a Vietnam Veteran, says his time as an Army sergeant still helps him today. “It gave me the leadership skills and discipline I need to run my company and to succeed in life,” he explained. He also graduated from CSU-Dominquez Hills with a business and finance degree and worked as a financial analyst at an investment firm. “That taught me how to prepare financial statements, do cash flow analyses and how to explain my business to someone else,” Hale said.

At first, Hale worked out of his home and sold used rental equipment. But he soon expanded and started selling construction supplies such as transformers, electrical materials and power tools in addition to large pieces of equipment.

He’s worked on some huge infrastructure projects over the years including San Francisco’s Moscone Center, the Pentagon and FBI headquarters in Washington, D.C. and the Staples Center in Los Angeles.

He will supply steel, lumber and concrete forms for the high-speed rail program. Hale said it will be enough work that he’ll hire some local people in the Central Valley.

He said he doesn’t mind telling other small business owners how to get involved in multi-million dollar projects. “It takes a lot of hard work. But I also have information to share because I’ve been in business so long,” Hale said. “It’s my way of giving back to the community.”

## Ecotech Resources, Inc.



Jeffrey Root was surveying the landscape for contracting opportunities that would promote the growth of his one-person consulting firm. After a protracted search, Root found the perfect partner in the Authority.

“My business would have tanked if it were not for the high-speed rail project,” said Root, principal owner of Ecotech Resources, Inc.

“DVBE is a great thing,” Root added, “but it’s really hard to get a service business up and running. High-speed rail has really turned me around.”

Berkley-based Ecotech Resources, Inc. is a subcontractor for Continental Field Services and Hammer Jewell & Associates, two prime contractors performing right-of-way appraisals for the Authority. Root said his firm conducts

environmental studies to determine if properties are contaminated.

A graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, Root has more than 25 years of experience in environmental consulting. He decided to form his own consulting firm five years ago and like any start-up; he struggled to secure contracts necessary to stabilize his firm.

“Because of the high-speed rail, I was able to hire three contractors to support the work I’m doing in the Central Valley,” Root said. “So I am providing work to four people and it’s great. The four of us are rocking and rolling.”

Root hopes to land additional contracts with the Authority as work in the Central Valley gathers momentum. “Having worked on the high-speed rail project has allowed this DVBE to establish itself,” Root said. “Every company opens in the garage and I’m just trying to get out of the living room.”

## Petra Resource Management



No one has to tell Bill Cook it takes years of work to prepare a section of high-speed rail for construction. While the Authority forges ahead with work in the Central Valley, Cook's company, Petra Resource Management (PRM), is working on the Los Angeles to San Diego section of the program.

PRM is providing archeological services along the proposed Southern California alignment, which includes a number of Native American tribal sites. Cook, a Marine Corps Vietnam Veteran, says he opened his company in 2012, 27 years after working under the moniker Petra Products, Inc. That same year, he obtained the firm's certification as a DVBE and won a subcontract with CH2M Hill, the prime contractor doing preliminary planning, engineering, public outreach and development of high-speed rail route between Los Angeles and San Diego.

"It was very important for a young DVBE company to be part of this project so quickly," Cook said. "Although my company is relatively new, staff members are credentialed, experienced, qualified and recognized as experts in cultural resource management compliance and practice."

Cook admitted he and his employees don't have an easy task. They spend hours on their hands and knees, carefully digging and sifting soil and rocks as they hunt for and identify objects and sites with prehistoric and historic significance. The back-breaking archeological work and analysis will become part of environmental documentation. Once construction begins, they will make sure that anything of archeological significance is not disturbed. Instead, it will be respected based on cultural guidelines and documented for future reference.

Cook knows that when it comes to high-speed rail, his firm has a lot of work ahead. He believes it will allow his company to continue to grow. He said, "We expect to be hiring more people as the project progresses."