

Sea Sub Systems finds new ways to grow in Pinellas with help from the SBDC and PCED



Sea Sub Systems, Inc. has been growing in Pinellas County for almost 35 years, and the future looks good for a continuation of that growth. Since 2007, the company has worked with **Pinellas County Economic Development** to manage its growth and plan for its future, utilizing a number of tools and programs designed to support and encourage local business expansion

“Pinellas has been an ideal place for us,” explains Anne LaMaire, owner of Sea Sub Systems (SSS). “Of course, surrounded by water, we’re in the perfect location for our marine services industry. But we’ve also gained so much by locating in a place with resources to help local businesses succeed.”

SSS provides international underwater ship repairs and crew boat services, specializing in difficult marine services such as propeller straightening, hull cleanings, underwater salvage operations, and sea launches. The company prides itself on an impeccable safety record and a commitment to excellence. That commitment is evident in its project track record – and in its pursuit of new and better ways to grow its client base.

Working with the **Florida Small Business Development Center** (FSBDC) at Pinellas County Economic Development (PCED), Anne LaMaire has had access to a team of experts, able to guide her through the intricacies of various business certification programs.

“There are many intriguing government contract opportunities out there,” explains Yolanda Cowart, FSBDC Business Consultant, “and it can be overwhelming to sift through them all, looking for the best fits. I often first steer clients like LaMaire toward state and local government options, which are abundant and usually offer a simpler bidding process than many federal opportunities.”

With Cowart’s assistance, LaMaire sought and received certification in Pinellas County’s **Small Business Enterprise** program, which provides for a sheltered marketplace in which qualified vendors may bid on County purchases. LaMaire also worked with the FSBDC’s Government Procurement Manager, Charlene Bostic, to become certified under the Small Business Association (SBA) 8(a) Program. Under the SBA 8(a) certification, SSS became eligible for federal contracts and sub-contracts, opening the company to new opportunities to expand its services.

“The FSBDC has specific resources that are designed to help facilitate businesses interested in government contracting,” says Dr. Cynthia Johnson, Center Director of the FSBDC at PCED. “In Pinellas, we have two of the region’s leading government contract consulting experts at the disposal of our clients.”

SSS has also long been a client of the Business Development division of PCED and has benefitted from its knowledge of programs and tools that foster business expansion. In 2009, SSS applied for and **received a training grant** through Florida’s **Incumbent Worker Training** (IWT) program, allowing the company to provide advanced training to a number of employees, thereby positioning the company to expand its services. More recently, LaMaire worked with Scott Talcott, PCED

Business Development Manager, to identify solutions for new training needs.

“The IWT program is a great program with a lot of benefits,” asserts Talcott, “but it’s not the only program of its kind. CareerSource Pinellas offers an **Employed Worker Training** program that awards grant funding locally, and with specific requirements that can work really well with highly specialized businesses.”

SSS has been the recipient of two EWT grant awards in 2013 and 2014, allowing the company to pursue specialized employee training in underwater welding, updated captains licensing, and Lean training for its management team.

“The EWT grant awards gave us the cost-effective means to advance our team’s skills; skills that enhance both the safety and quality of our operations,” says LaMaire.

That commitment to the highest possible level of service is a hallmark of the Sea Sub Systems brand. By utilizing the services provided through Pinellas County Economic Development and the Florida Small Business Assistance Network, LaMaire has already found many ways to grow her company and sees the potential for further future growth.

“There’s a huge amount of knowledge and expertise available in Pinellas to help businesses like ours succeed,” she attests. “To find all of that in one place is very unique, and makes it so easy for local companies to access. I’m very happy with the assistance we’ve received, and I’m sure Sea Sub Systems will continue to take advantage of the resources available through PCED and the FSBDC as we continue to grow.”

Learn more about Sea Sub Systems, Inc. at www.seasubsystems.com.

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