

NATIONAL RECOGNITION

Local engineer captures big federal work

TN & Associates casts national shadow

The firm is only 13 years old, but in that short time TN & Associates Inc., a Wauwatosa-based engineering company, has spread its wings to become a national leader in federal contracting.

"We've focused in the last few years on developing federal programs, and for some reason we've been very lucky," said Terry Ni, the firm's owner and president. "We're very much a federal contractor."

TERRY NI
Owner and
President
TN & Associates Inc.

"Many local companies ask how we built this profile, and I say it's through hard work and effort — a very big team effort."

TN's latest big prize, signed earlier this fall, is a \$38 million contract for the U.S. Navy. The company will perform environmental engineering, site remediation and construction engineering for Navy bases around Florida, she said.

Also in the last year and a half, the company has snared another \$30 million-plus contract with the Navy for similar environmental and construction work in San Diego, as well as a \$6 million Navy contract in Philadelphia. TN recently completed a \$20 million program for the U.S. Department of Energy, and its list of federal clients also includes the Army, the Air Force, the Army Corps of Engineers and the Environmental Protection Agency, Ni said.

It all started in the early 1990s with a winning bid on a \$25,000 contract for the Army, but TN's early forays into federal contracting amounted to more misses than hits, she said. At first, the company had a 1-in-20 success ratio on federal jobs; now it's more like 1-3 or 1-4, a considerable improvement, Ni said.

Becoming a steady client for the federal government is a cumulative process, she said. One winning bid can lead to another, and several successful bids can lead to even more. It all hinges on developing diversified project capabilities, Ni said.

"When I say sweat and tears, it's very true," she said. "It took a lot of years to build our federal profile. Many local companies ask how we built this profile, and I say it's through hard work and effort — a very big team effort."

No stopping

But just because TN landed the large Navy contract in Florida doesn't mean the firm's work is through, which holds true for its other federal contracts, Ni said. The \$38 million program is comprised of many smaller projects — ranging anywhere from \$500,000 to \$5 million, spread over five years — and the company will have to meet the Navy's expectations for quality and cost on each in order

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BY JEREMY HARRELL DAILY REPORTER STAFF



TN & Associates' "very elite team" includes, from left, John Fleissner, principal engineer, Nova Clite, senior hydrogeologist, Terry Ni, president, Dan Brady, senior manager, and John Moser, principal engineer.

to take in the full contract value, she said.

"There will be a lot of projects in there, and you have to work on each project as they come," Ni said. "The tough part is coming. (The Navy) has different vehicles for their projects, and we're just one vehicle. Everybody has to compete. But we are at an advantage."

Wisconsin is not a hotbed for federal contracting, and that has sent the firm's reach across the country. The company has 190 employees in more than a dozen offices in 10 states, and those numbers could grow as the firm tries to be as close as possible to where its steadily increasing workload is.

"You have to have an office close to where the facilities are," she said. "It's not an easy task, but it's a commitment you have to make."

The company also works closer to its Wauwatosa roots and is a frequent client of the Wisconsin Department of Transportation, Ni said. Though TN clearly sets its eyes on federal work, its state work is a critical part of the firm's business strategy and forms more than 20 percent of its revenue, she said.

"It's not very visible in our revenue, but

it's a very important part of our company," Ni said.

Stepping out

Reflecting its broad national reach, TN also casts a wide net in terms of market specialization. The company performs environmental engineering and remediation, civil engineering, transportation engineering and ecological management. Its staff is equipped to execute construction management duties, and it carries out some construction projects, although that doesn't include erecting buildings, Ni said.

"We do everything up to buildings," she said. "We do a lot of dirt work."

Ni founded the company in 1989 after moving from Taiwan in 1977, and though she's been the firm's leader from the beginning, she's eager to shine the light of success on the rest of the company.

"I did not win the contract for the company," she said. "We have a team, a very elite team. It's the company's glory."

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