



Office of Civil Rights

Hard Work Equals Success

In conjunction with African American History Month, Caltrans is spotlighting Disadvantaged Business Enterprise: Willis Rebar. This is part of a series of articles showcasing Caltrans' sub-contractors' successes.

Last year, Raymond Willis worked on more Caltrans contracts than any other Black American subcontractor. He also had more to overcome than most.

He is a disabled-veteran who owns a Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) that is also a small business.

"I've always felt like I am on the cusp of doing something great," Willis said. "I want to be a success and do something no one else in my family has done."

Willis was born in Richmond, California to the captain of the Richmond Police Department and a dental hygienist. When he first learned how to weld, forge and read blueprints in his high school Regional Occupation Program (ROP) class, his parents weren't sure how profitable these skills would be. That concern was eased long ago when Willis Rebar generated a six-figure income.



In the eight years since Willis Rebar was founded, the company has completed dozens of projects for Caltrans and local agencies. Willis bids on twice as many jobs as he is awarded, and he's not afraid to travel for work.

Willis has worked as far north as Del Norte County and as far south as Los Angeles. For three years, he worked on the Regional Connector Transit Corridor, which constructed a light rail tunnel that connected two Los Angeles Metro rail lines to the Union Station in Los Angeles. He also built 30 massive concrete piles to support the new Fifth Street Bridge in Marysville.

He advises other disadvantaged businesses to get certified and bid on as many projects as possible. Before he was certified, he said his prices were too high. So, he developed business relationships, which helped him negotiate raw material prices. After he got DBE certified, prime contractors were motivated to use him to meet their DBE goals.

He said he first found jobs on his local builder's exchange. He purposefully looked for jobs with high DBE goals. Soon enough, he started getting calls from contractors who had found his name on the Caltrans DBE directory or on the side of his truck.

If he were advising other disadvantaged businesses on how to get a Caltrans job, he said they should take a project management class, keep their credit score up, hire reliable staff, and bid a price they can afford.

"Try to be competitive but don't undercut yourself. If it's a fair price, you'll get the job," Willis said.

To get certified as a Disadvantaged Business Enterprise visit [Caltrans' Website](#).