



SMALL BUSINESS PRESS

Leveling the Playing Field to Provide Equal Opportunities for ALL

2024, Issue 1

Civil Rights Deputy Director Welcome

Welcome to the Small Business Press, a newsletter published by the Office of Civil Rights three times a year to share the latest information, data, and updates on Caltrans contracting opportunities with small, disadvantaged businesses. Small businesses are vital Caltrans partners, and we cannot rebuild California's transportation system without you. We hope you find this information useful and informative.

David DeLuz
Deputy Director of Caltrans Office of Civil Rights



Caltrans Commemorates the 60th Anniversary of the Civil Rights Act

As we mark the 60th anniversary of the [Civil Rights Act of 1964](#), it's imperative to reflect on its profound impact and the ongoing journey toward equality. Six decades ago, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed this transformative legislation, affirming the fundamental right of all citizens to equal treatment,

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Accessible Infrastructure

Caltrans' Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Infrastructure Program strives to give every person equal access to travel within California. The program is housed in the Caltrans Office of Civil Rights to protect the Department's most vulnerable users.

Most of California's 50,000-lane-mile transportation system was built more than half a century ago, and many rural highways are historic main streets. Wheelchairs must often navigate newsstands and utility poles on minimal

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Caltrans Commemorates the 60th Anniversary of the Civil Rights Act

irrespective of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. This pivotal act not only outlawed discrimination but also paved the way for inclusive access to public facilities and services, including transportation.

Transportation is more than a convenience; it's a critical artery of society, vital for accessing work, education, healthcare, and more. It's also a lifeline in emergencies and a cornerstone for societal prosperity. Recognizing this, the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) has been at the forefront of addressing and rectifying historical inequities within our transportation systems. In 2020, Caltrans committed publicly to correcting disparities and ensuring equitable access to transportation benefits for all Californians.

Our commitment extends through the redesign of our processes and planning efforts to create a resilient transportation system that fairly distributes benefits and challenges. The [Office of Civil Rights](#) at Caltrans plays a crucial role in ensuring that all stakeholders, especially from historically underrepresented communities, have equitable opportunities to participate in public works projects that shape our infrastructure.

Despite significant progress, challenges remain. The enactment of California's Proposition 209 in 1996 presented hurdles by restricting affirmative action, impacting racial minority advancements in education and business. However, the federal [Disadvantaged Business Enterprise \(DBE\) program](#), established under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, continues to be a vital tool for promoting economic empowerment among minority and women-owned businesses. Last year alone, Caltrans awarded more than **\$1 billion** to DBE-certified businesses, marking a significant achievement in our commitment to equity.

As we reflect on the enduring influence of the Civil Rights Act, we recognize that our work is far from complete. The ongoing struggles for justice and inclusion—from the Chicano Movement to the Feminist Movement and beyond—remind us that the voices of marginalized communities remain strong and clear. In response, Caltrans is intensifying its efforts by engaging with communities, utilizing innovative tools like the [Transportation Equity Index](#), and continuously reevaluating our transportation systems to ensure equitable benefits for every Californian.

Looking to the future, we are dedicated to making California's transportation system a paragon of equity and fairness, where every individual can share in its benefits. As we continue our journey, guided by the principles of the Civil Rights Act, we strive to build an inclusive society that celebrates and respects the diversity and dignity of all its members. Sixty years from now, we hope to look back with pride on the advancements we've made, knowing we've lived up to the promise of the Civil Rights Act.

Pull out Facts

The Caltrans Office of Civil Rights (OCR) sets small, disadvantaged, and disabled veteran business project goals, certifies Disadvantaged Business Enterprises (DBEs), oversees the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Infrastructure Program, analyzes data, develops the workforce, provides outreach and supportive services to level the playing field and provide equal opportunities for ALL.

Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) Program:

Caltrans has an office that certifies businesses that are eligible for the [DBE program](#). This certification helps small, disadvantaged businesses compete fairly on federally funded projects.

For federal fiscal year 2023-24, Caltrans OCR's [DBE Certification](#) Office is on pace to process more than 500 DBE applications and continues to confirm DBE eligibility for over 3,100 firms. While staffing has remained the same, the workload has increased 62% over last year's numbers.

This calendar year, Caltrans launched its triennial Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA)-sponsored Disparity Studies to advance equity and measure the difference between how many minority contractors are available compared to how many were used on contracts. The FHWA study runs on contracts awarded between January 1, 2020, through December 31, 2023, and the FTA study runs between October 1, 2020, through September 30, 2023. These are in-depth, year-long studies that determine the federal FHWA and FTA DBE goals on construction, procurement, and services for the next three years going forward. For more information, visit <https://dot.ca.gov/programs/civil-rights/disparity-study>.

On April 9, 2024, the United States Department of Transportation issued a [final rule](#) that modernized the DBE and Airport Concessions DBE program regulations with less prescribed rules. For more information, visit <https://www.transportation.gov/briefing-room/usdot-significantly-modernizes-disadvantaged-business-enterprise-program-and-airport>

Data:

As of April 30, in federal fiscal year 2023-24, Caltrans awarded 169 Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) assisted contracts, valued at more than \$2 billion. Of that, Caltrans committed more than \$463 million (or 22.63%) of its contracts to DBEs.

Between July 1 and December 31, 2023, Caltrans expenditures totaled \$1 billion in state-funded contracts. Of that, certified Small Businesses (SBs) participated in more than 31% and received more than \$336 million. Disabled Veteran Business Enterprises (DVBEs) participated on nearly 2% of contracts and were awarded nearly \$21 million.

Outreach:

In addition to regular Caltrans-hosted free educational [outreach events](#), Caltrans will host the fourth DBE Summit in the second week of October 2024 in the Fresno area. Visit the Caltrans Office of Civil Rights [Calendar of Events](#) for the latest information.

Caltrans will also partner on:

- The [Small Business Diversity Network "RECON" Resource Conference](#), which will be held from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Tuesday, June 25, 2024. Find more information [here](#).
- The Small Business Diversity Network "[PRO-CON](#)" [Procurement Conference](#), which will be held Wednesday, September 25, 2024, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at 340 W Commonwealth Ave, Fullerton, CA 92832.
- The [Western Region Multi-Industry Supplier Diversity Convention](#), which will be held August 22-23, 2024.

Director's [Video](#) to small, disadvantaged businesses.



Jennifer Baker

“It feels good to work at OCR, where we make a difference in the lives of thousands of small businesses – every day!”

Civil Rights Employee Spotlight

Customer service runs in Jennifer Baker's family, so it's no surprise that after certifying Disadvantaged Business Enterprises in the federal program for nearly a decade, she was recently promoted to Caltrans Office of Civil Rights (OCR) Certification Unit manager.

"I've always been involved with customer service in some form or another whether for internal or external customers for over 30 years," Baker said. "It feels good to work at OCR, where we make a difference in the lives of thousands of small businesses – every day!"

OCR's mission is to promote equal opportunity in Caltrans programs, services, and activities. Baker says she feels privileged to assist small businesses in obtaining Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) certification, which aims to level the playing field for small businesses to bid on federally funded contracts. The businesses that qualify for the [DBE certification requirements](#) have historically been underused, compared to their presence in the marketplace.

Baker started her state service in 2008 as a Disability Retirement Benefits Specialist at CalPERS. She was promoted to Retirement Program Specialist 1 in 2010. In 2012, she became a Staff Services Analyst at the CalPERS Equal Opportunity Program, where she held monthly Disability Advisory Council meetings to bring awareness to Americans with Disabilities (ADA) issues that needed improvement and assisted with internal employee complaints. She was promoted to Associate Government Program Analyst in 2014 with OCR.

Baker said her mother was a major influence on her life. Her mom worked for the State of California but retired early to return to school, and became a Lutheran Pastor and a Chaplain, assisting 9-1-1 emergency personnel with their grief at Ground Zero in December 2001.

Baker is married to her husband of 20 years, Bryan. Their son, Colby, is planning to pursue a career in urban planning at Soka University in Aliso Viejo this fall.

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Accessible Infrastructure

strips of uneven sidewalks between storefronts and cars whizzing by at upwards of 55 miles an hour.

Caltrans owns 66,000 curb ramps and miles and miles of sidewalks along city highway right-of-way land. Ensuring that the transportation system complies with the ADA is an ongoing endeavor.

Each year, Caltrans dedicates a minimum of \$35 million towards improving Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Infrastructure access. Since 2010, Caltrans has spent nearly \$509 million on ADA improvements, providing 6,388 curb ramps and more than 39 miles of ADA-accessible sidewalk. In just the 2022-23 fiscal year alone, Caltrans committed more than \$39 million for ADA improvements. These projects made more than 576 curb ramps and nearly five miles of sidewalk ADA-accessible. In 2023-24, Caltrans expects to complete 16 ADA access improvement projects, worth more than \$76 million.

Caltrans ADA Infrastructure Program works internally with the divisions of Project Delivery and Traffic Operations to ensure design standards, encroachment permit provisions, and construction compliance all contribute to ADA-accessible infrastructure. These divisions have developed policy, design guidance, and training to help educate Caltrans employees on the ADA standards and produce products that improve access to California's disabled community.

ADA accessibility is the responsibility of Caltrans as an organization. The ADA Infrastructure Program in the Office of Civil Rights orchestrates Caltrans statewide efforts to ensure persons with disabilities can use California sidewalks and facilities with ease. The public can notify Caltrans of ADA access barriers at: <https://adapt.dot.ca.gov/grievance/newRequest>.

Before

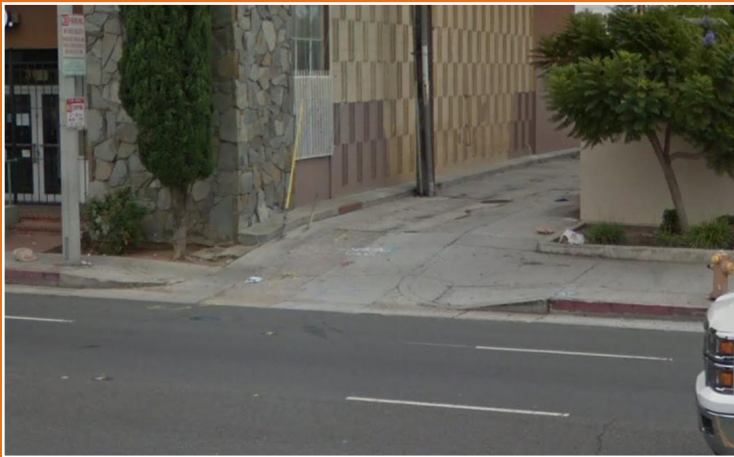


Photo Courtesy of Parsons, Inc.

After



Here, on State Route (SR) 1 near Long Beach Avenue in Long Beach, Caltrans upgraded an alley crossing to warn visually impaired pedestrians of potential vehicle traffic.

This was a difficult fix because there was a very steep alley slope leading to SR 1. The alley right of way belongs to the city of Long Beach, so this project required coordination with the city, the utility company, and the building owner to make this accessible amid utility lines, a retaining curb ramp, and a very close privately owned building.



Business Spotlight Introduction

The Road Repair and Accountability Act of 2017 (**Senate Bill (SB) 1, Beall, Chapter 5, Statutes of 2017**) required Caltrans to increase outreach to increase disabled-veteran, minority; and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) contractors to increase their participation on Caltrans projects.

The bill referenced the federal Disadvantaged Business Enterprise program, which is designed to level the playing field for African Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans, Asian-Pacific and Subcontinent Asian Americans, and women, who are presumed to be socially and economically disadvantaged, but others can qualify on a case-by-case basis.

The Caltrans Office of Civil Rights – known as OCR – strives to increase the participation of those groups through workforce development, outreach, education, supportive services, and more.

As part of this effort, please read spotlight articles for each of the state and federal groups identified in the laws above.

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Building Inclusive Coalitions

Caltrans Office of Civil Rights spotlights, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) business, Pendergast Consulting Group, as part of a series showcasing Caltrans' contractors' diversity.



Paul Pendergast stands in the San Francisco Presidio with the Doyle Drive Replacement Project in the background. Paul's consulting firm administered the Economic Impact Program Management for that project.

Paul Pendergast builds partnerships and coalitions across ALL agencies, cultures, and stakeholders.

In 1992, he founded [Pendergast Consulting Group](#) in San Francisco. The firm's diverse team managed the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge Oakland Touchdown's small business program from 2006 through 2007, directed the Caltrans District 4 CalMentor Mentor Protégé Program from 2009 to 2014, started the Fresno CalMentor program in the 2000s, and directed the small business program for the Doyle Drive Replacement Project from 2009 to 2017, to name a few noteworthy projects.

Pendergast Consulting Group is an inclusive public affairs firm that builds coalitions, conflict resolutions, identity development, education

campaigns, strategic communications, and more. The firm creates 3-D images, logos, and websites as part of its full-scale economic impact programs, which it developed for the California High-Speed Rail's Early Train Operator Contract and the Los Angeles World Airport's upcoming \$15 billion in infrastructure developments in preparation for the 2028 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Over the last few decades, Pendergast has been an advocate for ALL small, disabled-veteran-owned, or minority-owned businesses. He supports the federal [Disadvantaged Business Enterprise](#) program and says that without it, "it would be the rule of the jungle because every company wants to self-perform what they can themselves."

Four years ago, Pendergast said a number of his colleagues realized that the only people "missing from the table" were members of the Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender (LGBT) community. That is when he founded BuildOUT California, which connects, advocates, and builds small business capacity. BuildOUT California was the first entity to begin tracking LGBT utilization on construction projects for public agencies and utilities.

"In the last four years, BuildOUT California has become the world's largest industry association serving the A&E [architectural and engineering], construction, and real estate development industries with over 7,200 LGBT/allied firms, professionals and stakeholders around the world,"

Pendergast said. "BuildOUT now has a seat at the table on the Caltrans Small Business Council and other industry-leading councils."

Pendergast said he was especially proud of the January 12, 2024 "Golden Pitch" virtual event, during which Caltrans' Construction Chief Ramon Hopkins gave an executive briefing about the Los Angeles I-10 reopening after the critical artery was damaged from a November 11 storage yard fire underneath.

"He gave an amazing presentation and brought on Security Paving and Giffith to talk about what happened," said Pendergast, who curated the event. "Everyone asked, 'How did you get it done so fast?'"

Pendergast said the pandemic helped BuildOUT California expand.

"We used to have to deal with the limitations of geography, but the pandemic broke down borders," Pendergast said. "We offer something new, and we deliver it in a meaningful and inclusive way. We always look at where we are, where

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Visit Caltrans' Civil Rights program webpage to get certified as a [Disadvantaged Business Enterprise](#), or visit the Department of General Services [Cal eProcure](#) website for information on [Small Business Certification](#).



Military Services to Insurance Services

Caltrans Office of Civil Rights spotlights, Disabled-Veteran Business Enterprise Bennett Insurance and Financial Services, as part of a series showcasing Caltrans' sub-contractors' diversity.

After spending 13 years defying gravity flying high-speed military jets in the 1970s and early 1980s, Disadvantaged Veteran Business Enterprise (DVBE) owner Lenny Dean suffered a compressed spine.

U.S. Marine Major Dean flew the F4 Phantom and F18 Hornet, which he described as having the acceleration of a Tesla – times three. The 1979 Top Gun graduate received his Navy Aviator Wings and was stationed with the United States Marine Corps Fleet on the West Coast.

"It was a dream come true, and a thrill every flight," he said, "But it was hard work pulling 6 to 7 Gs [Gravity force] for hours, then landing on a carrier."

It also came with a price.

In 1983, he separated from the Marines and began a career in financial services. For 20 years, Dean worked for Principal Financial Group. Even though the job was not physical, he was still in excruciating pain from his years as a pilot. He had a hip replacement due to damage to his spine. The Veterans Administration deemed him 70% disabled, and in 2009 Dean had his spine fused. While recovering from that surgery, he and his wife, Deborah Bennett, started the DVBE [Dean Bennett Insurance and Financial Services](#) to help others get insurance and financial assistance.

"I have retired three times," said 74-year-old Dean. "But I gained so much knowledge getting my Certified Financial Planner credential, that I feel obligated to share it and help others."

When Dean, who has a bachelor's degree in Kinesiology from California State University, Long Beach, started learning about the DVBE program, he said he had no idea where to start. "It is difficult, being a small service



Dean Bennett and his wife, Deborah, founded Disabled-Veteran Business Enterprise, Bennett Insurance and Financial Services, to help others through the insurance challenges Dean faced.

business," he said. "You have to understand how the DVBE program works, and how marketing works."

His wife, a retired District Attorney Criminal Investigator, gained so much knowledge handling Dean's medical benefits, that she added those to their business' services. She said medical insurance is difficult to understand, and billing errors are common and frustrating. Veterans often come to Dean Bennett Insurance and Financial Services to pair their Medicare and Veterans Administration assistance together to have more comprehensive benefits.

"A lot of people don't understand their options," Bennett said. "We work with a lot of seniors and veterans. We go the extra mile because we know from personal experience how important it is. It is very rewarding to help others."

Dean said financial services is a good line of work for a disabled veteran.

"I don't have to carry 100 pounds," he said. "All I have to do is talk and write."

Dean Bennett Insurance and Financial Services is based out of Sacramento, but fittingly serves clients all over the country.

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From Playing with Rocks to Being a Rock

Caltrans Office of Civil Rights is spotlighting Subcontinent Asian American Jinesh Mehta to showcase Caltrans' contractors' diversity.

When Jinesh Mehta was a child, he played with “[grit](#)” at his dad’s small business in India. Now he works with grit for a living, working as a Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE), inspecting, evaluating, and testing materials, and engineering solutions for Caltrans.

“[Grit](#) is a word that describes me,” Mehta said. “I am a passionate pursuer of finding the best solutions for the client and I want to build a workforce that has the same grit. My mission is to have a Growth mindset, Resilience, Ingenuity, and Tenacity [GRIT].”

Mehta earned his Master of Science degree in construction materials from [Purdue University](#) in 2004. After working for Alta Vista Solutions for more than a decade, Atlas Technical Consultants bought the company. Since Mehta enjoyed being part of a small firm where he could affect change, he decided to start his own small business. He named it [Grit Force Inc.](#) after the materials used in concrete, and the strength of character he has a reputation for.

Grit Force Inc. inspects structures, with the goal to address issues while they are small. If large safety con-

cerns are discovered, structures are closed to the traveling public while they are repaired.

Mehta won his first – and second – Caltrans contract on August 9, 2023. One was an emergency project to conduct steel bridge ultrasonic testing across California. The other contract called for technical specialist engineering services for Caltrans.



Jinesh Mehta

He said the biggest challenge was the unpredictability of the projects' delivery dates.

“It was definitely nerve-racking,” Mehta said. “I knew I needed to deliver, but I didn’t know when.”

He said his previous work at Alta Vista, familiarized him with the Caltrans' [Look Ahead report](#), and strategizing, and selecting a team for each contract. He shares his work with other firms, which he says helps develop trust and relationships.

He also credits his success to Caltrans' processes.

“Caltrans is a big, mature organization with standardized processes, so there are no surprises. If you have the qualifications, and you can put a good team together, you have a fair shot at doing Caltrans [Architectural and Engineering] A&E work.”

He said he’s learned to spend time doing his research during his initial screening. He recommends that new small businesses try various options, cast a wide net, and follow through on all commitments to develop a solid reputation. He gets 50% of the jobs he does a Statement of Qualifications for.

“If you’re starting a new business, DBE certification might help to get your foot in the door, but merit and excellence carry the torch forward,” Mehta said.

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As Strong as Steel

Caltrans Office of Civil Rights spotlights African American Disadvantaged Business Enterprise Marvella Steel Placers, and its CEO, Jacqueline Pruitt as part of a series showcasing Caltrans' subcontractors' diversity.

Now a successful small business owner, Jacqueline Pruitt was in and out of jail for years until age 23, when her parole officer and mother sent her to the Phoenix Rehabilitation House.

One week before being arrested the final time in 2003, the now 20-year sober addict said she had reached her breaking point and prayed to God to ask Him to remove her from the life she was living. He answered.

"I was ready for a different way of living," she said. "I kept my mind open, and my mouth closed."

She spent the next 31 weeks learning life skills, attending [Alcoholics Anonymous](#) (AA) meetings, and becoming a functioning sober adult. After graduation, [the Phoenix House](#) offered Pruitt a job. She worked there for four years until she had an impactful conversation with a friend during the Great Recession, in 2008.

"I was looking for a career change when I saw a friend in construction clothes and asked how much they made," Pruitt said. "They said \$60 an hour, and I said, 'Where do I sign up?'"

In 2009, the Long Beach resident started a four-year apprenticeship program at the University of Iron, Local 416, where she learned everything she could about rebar. Rebar is steel reinforcing rods used to hold concrete together, despite any cracks or fractures that may occur over time.

Her male counterparts challenged her and told her a woman couldn't work rebar as well as a man, which she said made her want to succeed at it even more. Pruitt developed a relatable quality of rebar itself: resilience.

"I had to be mentally strong, before becoming physically strong to work just like a man would work," Pruitt



Jacqueline Pruitt named her business Marvella Steel Placers, after her mother.

said. "Before I knew it, the guys were saying, 'She's here to stay. Let's mold her.'"

Early in her apprenticeship, Jacqueline realized she wanted to run her own rebar business, so she researched online, found the [Los Angeles Regional Contractor Development and Bonding Program](#), and attended webinars and boot camps to learn how to successfully contract with different general contractors.

She became a lead ironworker on freeway lane additions, bridges, abutments, retaining walls, and barrier rail on State Route (SR)-91 in Southern California; as well as the Port of Los Angeles Berth 200 Rail Yard Project,



the Port of Long Beach state-of-the-art Container Terminal and Middle Harbor Project, and the Wilshire Grand Center slab on metal decks (SOMD) project.

After becoming a certified Journeyman Ironworker in 2013, she helped deliver the Hollywood Park Casino – on time and under budget.

In 2016, she passed the Contractor's State License Board test and established [Marvella Steel Placers](#), which is a certified small, disadvantaged, woman, minority, local, LGBT-owned company. Pruitt named the company after her mother who passed away seven months after she became an ironworker.

“She is my eyes in the skies,” she said. “She loved me unconditionally and believed in me when I did not believe in myself.”

In 2022, Marvella Steel Placers' 25 employees completed \$7 million worth of work. The business is awarded about 15% of the jobs bid on, but Pruitt attributes her success to her tenacity, perseverance, and attention to detail.

“I am a small business, competing against multi-million contractors who can take on a low bid just to keep their guys busy,” she said. “My advice to other small businesses is to hold their price, but get familiar with the general contractors, and send them capability statements every time they send out a bid. Call them or go to their office so they can put a face to your name.”

On June 1, 2023, BuildOUT California [awarded](#) Pruitt the President's Award of Achievement. As director of the National Association of Minority Contractors of Southern California, she co-founded the Construction Contractors Alliance (CCA), Inc., to grow and develop underutilized construction businesses at their nexus with underrepresented populations and underserved communities. Pruitt is President of CCA, which is on the California High-Speed Rail Business Advisory Council. She is also a member of the Metro Transportation



BuildOUT California awarded Jacqueline Pruitt the President's Award of Achievement in 2023.

Business Council, and the California Black Chamber of Commerce, which is a member of the Caltrans Small Business Council.

“Marvella Steel Placers gives me an opportunity to be a part of something bigger than myself,” Pruitt said. “I apply the principles of AA to every part of my life. It works [the business is successful] if I work it. I see it as being of service. I employ people, which allows them to provide for their families. And we work on projects that build hospitals, freeways – and will improve the lives of others for generations to come.”

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Restoring Nature

Caltrans is spotlighting Native American Disadvantaged Business Enterprise: McCullough Construction, as part of a series showcasing Caltrans' subcontractors' diversity.



Hugh "Macky" McCullough Jr.

More than 35 years ago, Hoopa tribal member Hugh "Macky" McCullough Jr. began his restoration career on his home reservation.

Now, McCullough has worked throughout California, Nevada, and Colorado restoring roads, stream channels, and saving sediment for spawning fish. He is the president of Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) McCullough Construction, based out of Arcata – one hour west of the Hoopa Reservation in Northern California. The family business constructs in-stream fish habitat restoration, replaces culverts, establishes vegetation, removes dams, thins out forests; and builds roads, pedestrian bridges, trails, bridges, retaining and mechanically stabilized earth walls.

As an established DBE, McCullough advises new small, disadvantaged business owners to go into a trade they are personally good at. When he started his business, it was just his wife, Dena, himself, and a bulldozer. Dena did his books, and he did the restoration. Most of their initial jobs

were on the reservation, which the banks didn't count as they considered the small business for bonding purposes.

He learned as he went and worked his way through the different positions necessary to run a small business, including estimating. He suggests that new business owners educate themselves, acquire skills, and then go into the field.

"There are so many rules and environmental restrictions with creeks, streams, and birds. On some projects, I have to have monitors watching birds the whole time," McCullough said. "In northern California there are noise restrictions, light restrictions, and restrictions on when you can work. And then there is the weather ..."

McCullough went on to say that anytime you are moving the river over, it is a special project because it is so big. And he frequently is changing the path of rivers – sometimes as far as 100 feet due to installing shallow landforms and backwater channels for fish habitat.

"We have a lot of really cool projects," said McCullough. "We just removed the Upper York Dam that was built in 1900 for a fish and ecological habitat improvement in St. Helena."

McCullough Construction also restored a road in Shelter Cove after rain washed it out. The topography on many projects is often steep and forest fires stop their work.

"It was a difficult project, but it

turned out awesome," he said.

McCullough said it takes time to build a business, and a good, honest, reliable reputation. He listens to his clients to understand their goals and deliver what they want on time and within budget.

He said the amount of Caltrans projects his company is doing is growing, but he has eight other projects his company is building for local government and non-profit organizations.

"I would advise new businesses not to put all their eggs in one basket," McCullough said. "Diversify your clientele and build relationships so when they need someone, they think of you."

He said it also takes time to build a skilled workforce, which is the most valuable asset any contractor can have.

"I am really lucky," he said. "I am surrounded by a lot of great people that care about the sometimes mundane things you need to do to be successful, and I get to go play."

In addition to his wife, McCullough's company now employs two of his three daughters. Rachelle McCullough-Hicks who does the accounting necessary to meet state and federal project requirements, and Janelle McCullough-Jones makes sure they can meet the staff requirements necessary to finish projects on time.

"That is one area that I know I never have to worry about," he said.

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Got Lemons, Make Lemonade

Caltrans Office of Civil Rights spotlights Hispanic Disadvantaged Business Enterprise Bayside Engineering Construction Inc. owner Luis Rivero as part of a series showcasing Caltrans' subcontractors' diversity.



Luis Rivero

One of the biggest motivators for some Disadvantaged Business Enterprises is their disadvantage.

Luis Rivero, owner of Bayside Engineering Construction Inc. (Bayside), was born in Caracas, Venezuela. His family moved to Washington in 1980 and ran a Mexican restaurant for 18 years. During his senior year of high school, Rivero earned an engineering scholarship from the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers. Then, Rivero earned his Bachelor of Science degree in civil engineering and master's in environmental engineering at Washington State University.

In 2000, Rivero moved to San Diego, where he started managing projects for the Department of Defense, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the Department of Energy. But Rivero wanted to start his own engineering

consulting firm. After several years of planning and development, Bayside launched in May of 2018.

Rivero became a licensed contractor and was accepted into the Small Business Administration's (SBA) 8(a) Business Development Program. Bayside is certified as a Disadvantaged Business Enterprise and Minority Business Enterprise.

Caltrans' San Diego District Business Services Manager gave him information about Caltrans bidding opportunities and helped Bayside enter the Calmentor Mentor-Protégé Program. Bayside became a subcontractor on a variety of construction, natural resources, and abatement projects.

When the COVID-19 pandemic came, Rivero was forced to think outside the box. He sought job opportunities nationwide. The firm found a niche in COVID-19 disinfection.

Rivero developed Bayside's health and safety training regime following the latest Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and Occupational Safety and Health Administration guidance for COVID-19 Positive Facility Cleaning and Disinfection.

"We do it all by the book," he said. "Our crews know they are accountable for safety – not only for themselves, but for others, as well."

Bayside has completed nearly 200 task orders, both as a prime and as a subcontractor, and they have a

zero-incident safety record.

They have disinfected Caltrans buildings, Naval and Marine Corps installations, U.S. Coast Guard facilities, and commercial buildings.

"My goal was to come up with new ways to keep our crew working during this new normal," he said.

And he has.

Now Rivero has come full circle. The agency that awarded him a scholarship in high school, the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers, just elected him Vice President of Corporate Affairs for the San Diego Chapter.

“

I'm proud of my heritage and I try to do everything I can to help my community succeed.

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Perseverance Pays Off

Caltrans Office of Civil Rights spotlights woman-owned Disadvantaged Business Enterprise, G&F Concrete Cutting, Inc., as part of a series showcasing Caltrans' subcontractors' diversity.

Rita Ferguson knows how hard it is to start a business as a disadvantaged enterprise owner in the highway construction field. Forty years ago, the Hispanic woman founded a two-person business that is now one of the largest woman-owned concrete-cutting businesses in Southern California.



Rita Ferguson

Before she established G&F Concrete Cutting, Inc., Ferguson owned and managed her own art gallery. But when the 1973 recession hit, she realized she couldn't rely on an income from high-end art.

At that time, Ferguson was developing an understanding of concrete cutting through her then-flancé (now husband of nearly 40 years, Greg Ferguson). In 1980, she sold her art gallery and invested in establishing G&F Concrete Cutting, Inc. Although she understood the trade and knew

how to run a business, she didn't anticipate the discrimination she would face.

"Potential customers didn't have a whole lot of faith that I knew what I was talking about," Ferguson explained. "When the union dispatched seasonal laborers straight off the strawberry field, I told them not everyone can work a Rivet Buster. The union would respond, 'Don't worry about it, sweetie.'"

When a union worker injured himself on that very machine commonly used to cut concrete, G&F had to handle the workers compensation case.

Since then, Ferguson's business has worked on hundreds of infrastructure projects, including the Cabrillo Bridge and Interstate 405 Sepulveda Expansion. This month, G&F broke ground on a two-year project as a sub-contractor for Atkinson Construction to rehabilitate the East Los Angeles State Route 60 truck corridor.

In the last decade, Ferguson has been recognized numerous times as one of the most powerful women in Southern California construction, earning the National Latinas in Business 'Construction Woman of the Year' and the Small Business Administration's 'Exporter of the Year.'

When she's not managing and operating her business, Ferguson serves as a member of the Southern California Contractors Association, Associated General Contractors of California,

Laborers Apprentice Committee, and Caltrans DBE Participation Committee, where she works to help more disadvantaged businesses get on Caltrans projects.

"I want to mentor small businesses because you don't know what you don't know until you realize you don't know it," Ferguson said.

" " I want to mentor small businesses because you don't know what you don't know until you realize you don't know it. " "

Visit Caltrans' Civil Rights program webpage to get certified as a [Disadvantaged Business Enterprise](#), or visit the Department of General Services [Cal eProcure](#) website for information on [Small Business Certification](#).



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Building Inclusive Coalitions

we want to get to, and how we can make process improvements and remain incredibly positive."

Associated General Contractors of California Chief Executive Officer Peter Tateishi said there are not many people who understand the importance and value of partnership more than Pendergast.

"Paul includes all viewpoints in conversations and engages stakeholders at every turn," Tateishi said. "He has a genuine interest and passion in elevating the construction industry and understands that we must work to create a more welcoming and inclusive culture if we are to secure the industry's future."

California Asphalt Pavement Association Executive Director Russell Snyder said he has worked with Pendergast for 20 years.

"I have always found him to be the ultimate optimist," Snyder said. "His enthusiasm is infectious, and he works hard to uplift everyone around him. So many people have benefited from his leadership over the years, and the construction industry is more diverse, more inclusive, and ultimately more successful because of his efforts."

From Hong Kong to California



Kwokhung (Dan) Yau

Caltrans Office of Civil Rights spotlights Asian Pacific Disadvantaged Business Enterprise Y & C Transportation Consultants, Inc. owner Kwokhung (Dan) Yau as part of a series showcasing Caltrans' subcontractors' diversity.

Kwokhung (Dan) Yau was born in Hong Kong in 1959. Sixty years later he is the majority owner of a 15-employee Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) that has earned more than 50 awards from the American Council of Engineering Companies, the American Public Works Association, and the American Society of Civil Engineers, for designing traffic control mechanisms like lighting and traffic signals that keep traveling Californians safe.

"It is very satisfying when a safety project I worked on reduces collision rates," said Yau. "I feel like I am making a contribution to improve society."

Yau said he decided to move to California from Hong Kong in 1980 to earn his bachelor's degree in civil engineering at California State University, Fresno. He then earned his graduate degree in Transportation Engineering from the University of California, Berkeley.

"I initially came to California for college, but then I found a job after graduate school," Yau said. "My employer at TJKM Transportation Consultants, Inc. liked my work so much, that he sponsored me to be a permanent resident."

Since then, he and another Hong Kong native, Kin Chan, founded Y & C Transportation Consultants, Inc. In the beginning, he said the biggest challenge was finding ways to team up with prime consultants, but once he certified his business with Caltrans as an Asian Pacific DBE, there were more opportunities. He also networked with large firms through the American Public Works Association and the American Council of Engineering Companies.

"If Firm A used us and talked about the job we did with Firm B, Firm B would then bring us on board," Yau said. "Without the Caltrans DBE program, the prime firms may not have had the incentive to team with us."

Yau's disadvantaged business has improved traffic control mechanisms on projects like the U.S. Highway 50/Watt Avenue Interchange in Sacramento County and the I-680 Express Lanes Project in Alameda and Santa Clara counties.

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Resources

The Office of Civil Rights (OCR) Workforce Development Branch (WDB) offers [Supportive Services](#) to OJT Heavy Highway Construction Trades Academy pre-apprenticeship and Heavy Equipment Operator Pilot Program graduates. As of March 2024, 22 of the 40 graduates have secured employment in various construction trades. OCR is expanding the HEO Academy Statewide. For more information, email OJT.SS@dot.ca.gov or DBE.SS@dot.ca.gov

This year, Caltrans rolled out a [statewide Construction Mentor Protégé Program \(CMPP\)](#). This program enhances technical skills and knowledge, developing and enabling small and disadvantaged construction companies to compete in Caltrans projects.

Caltrans increased the [National Summer Transportation Institute \(NSTI\)](#) program by 500% in 2023, sharing the variety of careers available in the field of transportation with 154 middle and high school students throughout the state. This was done in partnership with the California State Universities of Long Beach, Fresno, San Jose, Los Angeles, and Cal Poly Pomona.



Quick Links

Learn How to [Contract with Caltrans](#)

See Upcoming Architectural and Engineering (A&E) Work on the [A & E Look Ahead Report](#)

Register for [Caltrans' Bidding Connect](#) Portal

See [Current Construction Projects Advertised](#)

Click Quick Links on [Cal eProcure](#) to find all small business solicitations and past state purchases.

Caltrans' [Opt-In](#) Feature Allows Small Businesses to connect with Primes

Find your District Small Business Liaison at this [link](#).

Additional Resources

[Association of Procurement Technical Assistance Centers \(APTAC\)](#) provide free advice on all aspects of selling to the federal, state, and local governments. Find your local agency on the link to get started.

[Small Business Development Centers](#) throughout California counsel and train business owners to start, run, and grow their firms. Find your local center for assistance today.

The [Construction Resource Center](#) provides hands-on technical assistance, eLearning modules, educational materials, and mentorship programs to contractors, tradespeople, and future construction professionals.

Builders Exchanges, including the [Bay Area Builders Exchange](#), [Humboldt Builders Exchange](#), [Sacramento Regional Builders Exchange](#), [Golden State Builders Exchange](#), and [Central California Builders Exchange](#) help business owners find more work.

Email questions to erin.g.vontersch@dot.ca.gov, or to sign up for the Small Business Press."