



Office of Civil Rights

Building Family, Community, and Opportunity

In conjunction with November's National Native American Month, Caltrans is spotlighting Disadvantaged Business Enterprise: FMF Pandion, which is also a Disabled Veteran Business Enterprise. This is part of an ongoing series showcasing Caltrans' sub-contractors' diversity.

For Tommy Wells, launching [FMF Pandion](#) in 2016 was about more than starting a business — it was about building a legacy for his family and creating opportunities for others.

A proud disabled U.S. Marine Corps veteran and member of the Quapaw Tribe of Oklahoma, Wells drew on his personal history and professional expertise when shaping his company's identity. The name "FMF Pandion" carries special meaning: *Pandion* is a nod to the osprey, a bird he has long admired, and *FMF* represents both "For My Family" and the "Fleet Marine Force." The company logo reflects the Marine Corps colors, with stylized wings forming the letters "FMF."



After earning his bachelor's degree in biology with an environmental management focus, Wells built his career in water quality and environmental sciences, working with both private firms and regional councils in New Zealand and California. Along the way, he saw a persistent challenge: large firms often struggled to find reliable subcontractors who could meet the Disabled Veteran Business Enterprise (DVBE) goals, as well as quality standards. That challenge sparked the idea for his own company — one that would not only help meet small business participation goals but deliver excellence as a partner.

In July 2016, Wells officially launched FMF Pandion from San Diego. What began as a one-man operation quickly grew. By January 2017, he hired his first employee, and today the company has expanded to 12 staff members, including scientists and engineers. His wife, Vanessa, plays a central role as the company's backbone, managing accounting, IT, administration, and marketing.

Like many small businesses, FMF Pandion has faced hurdles. Early on, access to credit was a challenge, with banks hesitant to extend financing to a new company without a track record. Wells recalls the uncertainty of making payroll in those first years. Relief came through [Small Business Administration](#) (SBA) loans, followed by stronger financial footing as the company built its reputation and secured steady contracts. The COVID-19 pandemic brought another test, forcing temporary layoffs and tough decisions. Still, resilience carried the company through.

Certification programs also played a key role in FMF Pandion's success. As a **Disabled Veteran Business Enterprise (DVBE)** and **Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE)**, the company gained early opportunities to prove itself. Particularly with partners like [Michael Baker](#), Tetra Tech, Larry Walker Associates, HNTB, and [WSP](#). And agencies including Caltrans, LA Metro, City of Los Angeles, and City of San Diego. Over time, FMF Pandion shifted from relying on subcontracting to securing more prime contracts.

When asked what advice he would give to other small business owners, Wells is clear: *"Have your relationships in place first. Once you start a company, you can't step away and figure out where the work is coming from — you need to be ready from day one. Build your connections and line up opportunities before making the leap."*

From a Marine Corps foundation to environmental science expertise, and from family dedication to Native American heritage, FMF Pandion reflects the many dimensions of its founder. Wells' journey shows how vision, perseverance, and strong relationships can turn a one-person idea into a thriving small business making a big impact across California.



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](#).