

Corporation opens office on trust land



Thomas and Linda Grow

BY BRENDA AUSTIN

A multi-million dollar tribal member owned corporation, with a home office in Neenah, Wisc., and a satellite office and warehouse in Nipomo, Calif., is in the process of opening an office in Sault Ste. Marie, Mich.

Owner and CEO of JETA Corp., Linda Grow, and her husband and VP of Sales and Marketing, Thomas Grow, were approached by Sault Tribe EDC Director Joel Schultz, who sold her on the benefits of opening an office on tribal land.

Linda Grow was born in Sault Ste. Marie and grew up in the west end of the city, graduating from Sault Area High School in 1962. A successful businesswoman, Grow is interested in helping Native American owned businesses become more visible and have greater access to forming relationships and business partnerships with government contractors and buyers. She is also passionate about being able to bring work “back home” to the Sault, and offer good paying jobs with benefits to qualified individuals.

Her company is a distributor for the energy, construction and industrial markets, including nuclear and fossil fuel energy channels, solar, hydroelectric, co-gen operations and wind power. Today that support also crosses over to mechanical contractors doing work in power plants and large construction companies that support high power transmission distribution lines and substation work. JETA Corp. sells virtually every type of tool imaginable, from safety equipment and personal protective equipment, sophisticated safety technology and electrical componentry, to typical maintenance and repair items. “We represent over 3,500 manufacturers and vendor suppliers throughout North America and Europe,” Thomas Grow said. “We have a network supporting multiple product offerings to these companies. The main strategy of JETA is to have a few handfuls of customers, some of them extremely large, but we focus in on every detail of those accounts and want to be everything to those few. We keep a very tight focus on what we are doing. We have built a lot of synergy into our inventory system that has allowed us to stock popular products and maintain high fill rates for our customer base.”

Distributing through vendors, JETA does a lot of drop shipping throughout the U.S. In addition to their Wisconsin and California

offices, JETA also has procurement offices located inside the San Luis Obispo PG&E plant, and other customer facilities.

From an initial investment of \$65,000 in 2004, her company today generates over \$15 million a year.

She said when she purchased her company, only 5 percent of available government contracts were being offered to women-owned minority businesses. “That was really feeble,” she said. “There weren’t many minority-owned companies out there that qualified, especially Native American owned companies in our line of work.”

She said she believes her company presents a solid picture of a successful Native American woman-owned corporation that is competing for and winning large contracts in manufacturing and distribution.

Grow said they are investing in the community for the long haul and have hired their first two employees with a third in the works. “We are very excited about opening an office in the Sault,” she said. “My focus originally was to diversify, and coming home to the Sault brings this full circle for me. When I was a child growing up in the Sault, I watched my grandmother Pearl (Stewart) McGahey work hard alongside others to gain federal recognition for the tribe - and being able to bring my business home now is very rewarding for me.”

Grow plans on bidding on energy contracts that are currently being supported by vendors in countries outside of the United States, and bringing that business home to the Sault and her newly hired staff.

EDC Director Joel Schultz said, “I believe I speak on the behalf of the entire board of directors when I say we couldn’t be more pleased to have our own successful tribal member Linda Grow making the decision to expand her business right here on tribal lands in Sault Ste. Marie. Her commitment to success, and her desire to positively impact our lands and people represent the best kind of economic development my office could hope for. This is a very positive step in the right direction.”

Thomas Grow said the ultimate goal is to develop a distribution organization in the Sault with warehousing operations, which ultimately would support some of the utilities and contractors throughout Michigan along with local industries in the Sault, providing the opportunity for job expansion.