

A patriotic duty for some local firms: employing young veterans.

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Vets as entrepreneurs:
Building a business, as well as a reputation.

David Rambhajan has been in the construction business for 18 years, but he says his firm really started growing when he learned about the contracts he could get by citing his status as a veteran owned small business.

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Building a business, as well as a reputation

David Rambhajan has been in the construction business for 18 years, but he says his Chicago firm, Industria Inc., really started growing about six years ago, when he learned about the contracts he could get by citing his status as a service-disabled veteran.

Mr. Rambhajan, 45, who served in the Marine Corps Reserve from 1984 to 1992, says most people would look at him and say he's able-bodied. That's how he thinks of himself, too.

"My ankle clicks now because of something that happened," he says. "I said, 'Big deal. Life goes on.'" But other veterans told him he should get certified as service-disabled, and he finally agreed.

That status has helped Industria land government contracts on projects such as VA hospitals, but Mr. Rambhajan says he still has to prove that his company can get the job done.

When Industria began seeking more government contracts, it had to get bonding, insurance in case a contractor doesn't finish a job. At first, Industria got only \$500,000. "I said, 'Are you kidding me? These projects are bigger,'" Mr. Rambhajan recalls. Now, Industria has bonding of \$40 million, he says.

Last year, Industria had revenue of \$8 million and was profitable. When a larger construction company talks about using Industria on a project, Mr. Rambhajan says he tells the main contractor: "Hey, we're a construction services firm. We happen to be veteran-owned. We happen to be minority. Whatever. If that helps you with some goals, great. But we'd like to win your business because of the value we bring to the table."

Robert Loerzel



David Rambhajan's status as a service-disabled vet gives his company, Industria Inc., an edge in winning government contracts.

PHOTO BY BOB HAN