

MEMBER spotlight



Seated from left to right: Taryn J. Peppo and Adeline Barnes. Standing from left to right: Tyrone Barnes and T.J. Barnes.

A CEO IS RUNNING A FACILITIES-SERVICE management company on the East Coast. This CEO owns 100-percent equity interest in the company. And, similar to other CEOs in the industry, this person is responsible for strategic decisions and management of administration departments, financial departments and all services provided by the company.

By Theresa Rubinas

One important quality sets this CEO apart from many others. Taryn Peppo is president of Manhattan Maintenance (MMC), a 100-percent woman- and minority-owned firm and has more than 17 years of industry experience. Founded in 1984 by her father Tyrone Barnes, MMC has grown into a 100-percent green-chemical-using company that was awarded Top Secret government certification in 2007.

HOW IT ALL STARTED

Peppo graduated from Bucknell University in 1990. After graduation, she immediately wanted to join her father in his business but he advised her to spend a little time in corporate America first.

Heeding her father's advice, she worked for an office interior design company in Manhattan after graduation. She noted the lack of rewards and recognition for the long hours she spent when she worked in corporate sales. She quickly decided that she belonged somewhere where hard-working employees were promoted and recognized.

Peppo recalls her dreams of taking MMC to the next level. She desired to learn how to run a company from the bottom up and utilize the decade of industry knowledge she had already developed.

"Luckily, my father owned a very successful contract cleaning business and I started working directly under him," Peppo recalls. "In the back of my

mind I always knew I wanted to work in the family business.”

Her interest in the company began early in her life. Since age 13, Peppo worked at MMC during school breaks and vacations. Her responsibilities included answering phones, cleaning offices, stocking the warehouse and making deliveries.

After one year in corporate America, she knew it was time to make her move to MMC. She became a full-time executive in 1992.

MMC is a facilities-service company located in New Jersey. The company has nearly 300 employees that are both union and non-union. In 1995, MMC became a 100-percent woman and minority-owned full-service building maintenance company.

“I began working at MMC in 1991 and became president in 1995,” she recalls. “In 2001, my brother T.J. Barnes and mother Adeline also joined the firm and we all manage different divisions of the company.”

A ONE-SOURCE BSC

According to Peppo, MMC clients can receive one bill from one supplier for all services — office cleaning, HVAC, landscaping, snowplowing and handyman and/or minor repair services. In many instances, MMC has the ability to go beyond what their services specify. MMC has assisted customers with renovations, consulting and project management services. Customers appreciate the fact that they only have to make one phone call to MMC and their problems are solved.

“These are fun challenges, yet it is a good feeling to be able to truly help someone,” she adds.

She focuses on client relationships in the New York and New Jersey area and is involved on a daily basis with customers in all of MMC’s service divisions.

“MMC’s area of expertise is reliable customer service for clients with a portfolio of properties in multiple cities or states,” Peppo says.

While some companies may target their growth efforts within close proximity to their own geographic area, MMC has extended its service area as far west as Colorado.

SPEAKING FROM EXPERIENCE

Over the past decade, Peppo witnessed a trend of reduction in centralized purchasing and nationalized contracts. In the 1990s, the industry underwent a phase of mergers and downsizing. Large-leveraged potential customers figured they could save money by

creating national contracts for their national real estate portfolio.

The result was unexpected. As two or three companies obtained the national contracts, both competition and customer service decreased and cleaning quality had deteriorated. Large bureaucratic national contractors are not able to provide the customer service companies like MMC offer. Facility departments have also successfully communicated their need for the better customer service provided by regional companies to corporate purchasing departments.

“It seems like the trend has reversed and individual pieces of national portfolios are again purchasing services from reliable regional or local vendors,” Peppo explains. “The national contracting system has failed and customers want vendors like MMC that don’t have to make five phone calls to get an approval for a supply shipment.”

If there’s a problem or if customers need something right away, they can talk directly with Peppo. “Not many vendors offer the personalized customer service that MMC offers,” she adds.

CENTRALIZED FOCUS

“Our focus has been on steady organizational and revenue growth through strategic marketing and focused sales efforts. MMC’s business model is to focus on customers that recognize superior customer services and realize that at the end of the day, you always get what you pay for.”

MMC is currently targeting the pharmaceutical industry, New Jersey’s largest non-state subsidized, employment industry. In 2007, Manhattan Maintenance Co. added GlaxoSmith-Kline and Organon BioSciences to its pharmaceutical portfolio.

MMC feels strongly about employee retention. One of their focuses is reducing employee turnover and they work hard to follow a strong business model that includes:

- an extensive cleaner and supervisor training program
- competitive pay for employees
- employee rewards based on attendance and performance
- increased customer satisfaction

MMC has expanded its focus to gain more business opportunities. The company has utilized government contracts that have helped it gain valuable expertise and expand into new areas.

Most recently, MMC changed gears when it bought a headquarters building to house its operations, office and warehouse in one convenient location.

As of last January, MMC made Fairfield, N.J. its home. The company carefully planned the construction of the new building to enable expansion, space for training programs, storage and client meetings. MMC utilized all of its resources including its own laborers to renovate and remodel the new space.

BSCAI INFLUENCE

A BSCAI member since 2002, Peppo says, “I have attended two of the executive seminars and my experience was very positive. Hearing other contract-cleaning company owners voice similar frustrations and concerns was helpful, because as a group, we were able to solve several common challenges.”

She adds that MMC’s training program is built around watching BSCAI videos on training and supervising and discussing the techniques and practices after viewings. The conferences are also helpful, as they present the newest industry trends, products and revenue generators giving attendees the edge over others in the industry.

ISSUES FACING MINORITY AND WOMAN-OWNED BUSINESSES

Peppo believes that the biggest challenge facing all minority and woman-owned businesses is making the choice between following their business models versus pursuing new opportunities.

“I’m constantly in contact with my business consultant and executive team to evaluate opportunities and monitor our account growth and retention numbers,” says Peppo. “Most of our target companies have supplier diversity departments, but these departments tend to push W/MBE’s toward subcontracting or second-tier contracts. MMC constantly markets itself as a great and capable company that happens to be a W/MBE.”

MMC is in good shape with clients right now as they serve several Fortune 500 companies and nearly 8 million square feet of space daily. Yet, Peppo understands they still have a way to go as a minority- and woman-owned business in the industry.

“Until purchasing departments evaluate minority- and woman-owned companies based on relevant past experience, the playing field will not be level.”

Theresa Rubinas is the BSCAI Editorial Services Coordinator and can be reached at trubinas@bscai.org or (312) 321-5179.