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CONTRACTOR WINS MINORITY AWARD

SMALL BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION HONORS MEYER

Author: GITA SITARAMIAH

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BIOGRAPHY AWARD KATHLEEN MEYER

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Kathleen Meyer attributes her success in the male-dominated construction industry to a thick skin.

"Eleanor Roosevelt said no one could make you feel inferior without your consent, so I decided I wasn't going to let anyone make me feel inferior," said Meyer, owner of a Minneapolis water- and sewer-main contracting firm.

The strategy worked. The U.S. Small Business Administration on Monday named Meyer, an American Indian, as the Minnesota Minority Small Business Person of the Year.

In 1987, Meyer founded Meyer Contracting, specializing in the installation of water and sewer mains. Since then, her full-time staff has grown from three to 20. Her customers include the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the 934th Air Lift Wing, an Air Force Reserve unit.

Her biggest contract has been working on the Hiawatha Line, the state's first light-rail line that opened last year. She is also known for subcontracting to minority-, female-owned and smaller contractors.

Meyer, 53, said she grew up in Northeast Minneapolis in a single-parent home headed by her father, who taught her to value knowledge after his own difficult childhood on an Indian reservation. She became the first in her family to get a high school diploma, a college degree and own a business.

Meyer, who graduated from Metropolitan State College of Management, said she learned about the construction industry from many relatives in that business. After years in sales and other jobs, she saw an opportunity in contracting.

Karri Plowman, executive director of the Minnesota American Indian Chamber of Commerce, has marveled at Meyer's willingness to stay involved in the community while running a growing business.

"I think she's a wonderful role model to other Indian entrepreneurs," said Plowman, one of three to nominate Meyer for the award.

Meyer takes being a role model seriously. "There are so many small, emerging, struggling businesses and if there's any way I can help them and share my personal knowledge with them, I like to do that," she said.

She serves on the boards of the Minnesota American Indian Chamber of Commerce and the National Association of Minority Contractors Upper Midwest chapter, and she is a past president of the Association of Women Contractors. She has three children, including two sons who work for her.

Darcee Copus-Sabart, a contracting officer for the 934th Air Lift Wing who also nominated Meyer for the award, said she appreciates Meyer's positive attitude about doing the detailed paperwork associated with government contracts. "It's a breath of fresh air," Copus-Sabart said.

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Caption:
Photo

Kathleen Meyer

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