

FAST FACTS

Sentinel Fence LLC

Type of Business:
Fencing Contractor

Owner:
Sharon Hamilton

Address:
6325 E. Alta Hacienda,
Scottsdale 85251

Phone:
(480) 961-9294

Website:
www.sentinelfence.com

Business Began: 2002

Employees at Startup: 1

Employees in 2010: 15

First Year Revenue: -0-

Revenue in 2010: \$1.6 million

Startup Capital: \$110,000

Source of Initial Capital: Owner
Investment from Retirement Fund,
Loan from Unicorn

SBDC Counselor:
Lisha Garcia
Maricopa Community Colleges
SBDC
(480) 784-0590

Sentinel Fence LLC – Scottsdale, AZ



Sentinel Fence owner Sharon Hamilton

Sharon Hamilton had to overcome a lot of obstacles to build a successful fencing business.

Hamilton and husband Rick started their company in response to an opportunity to provide fencing for the federal prison system. He had worked for a large fencing contractor. She was a school administrator with several years of management experience. It seemed like a good start.

The company's first contract led to other large industrial projects, including fencing at Tempe's Diablo Stadium and contracts at correctional facilities across the country. "Our advantage was that we were small and maintained a low overhead and we could mobilize any place in the country," she noted.

Challenges slowed the company's fast start. Rick became ill and Hamilton was forced to run the company mostly on her own and often while accompanying her husband for treatments. Becoming certified for government contracting claimed even more of Hamilton's time.

Today, **Sentinel Fence** installs fencing and barriers for military installations, airports, and private prisons. The company earned Federal 8(a) Business Development certification status, which allows it to bid federal contracts as a women-owned business. "You have to qualify through a pretty extensive application process," Hamilton said.

Assistance from **Maricopa SBDC Diversity Programs Coordinator and Business Analyst Lisha Garcia** and **SBA Deputy District Director Shivani Dubey** was critical to Sentinel's success, according to Hamilton. "Lisha has been there every step of the way," she said. "She supplied me with all kinds of ideas, supported me during the certification process and gave me opportunities for networking."

Hamilton attended the Turner School of Construction Management at Garcia's suggestion. Garcia also advised her to meet with Dubey, who helped her navigate the 8(a) certification process.

Sentinel had already earned Certified Small Business Enterprise and Disadvantaged Business Enterprise status with the City of Phoenix. Certifications can lead to more work, noted Hamilton. "8(a) is a nine-year program and the mentor/protégé piece allows you to work with a large construction company to team up on projects. You can grow by expanding the scope of your company."

"I find it very rewarding and challenging," she said of owning her own business. "I enjoy meeting and working with people and I like going out on the jobsites. Owning a business has a new twist every year. There's always so much to learn and I've always loved to learn."

Hamilton's advice to new business owners? "Find a great advisor like I have at the SBDC who can be objective, and who will coach you and prod you along," she said. "It's all about relationships with people. Learn as much about running a business as you can."

Maricopa Community Colleges SBDC



Maricopa Community Colleges SBDC

The **Maricopa Community Colleges SBDC** is located in Phoenix, with satellite locations in Mesa, Scottsdale and Surprise. The Center serves all of Maricopa County. Center Director Mark Engle and his team served 1,073 counseling clients and 1,065 training clients in 2010. They can be reached at (480) 784-0590.



Mark Engle
Center Director



Claudia Smietana
Operations Coordinator



Dr. Rufus Glasper
Chancellor
Maricopa
Community
Colleges



Dr. Maria
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