



VETERANS: BE YOUR OWN BOSS (BYOB)

CAMEO MEMBERS PROVIDE BUSINESS ASSISTANCE TO CALIFORNIA'S VETERANS:

Despite having skills, discipline and focus to succeed, veterans face many workforce challenges. Some firms are reluctant to hire them because of the uncertainty surrounding PTSD. Some veterans may have the skills, but not the proper credentials to secure a position, e.g. paramedics. And female veterans face much higher unemployment rates than their male peers, perhaps because of the cutbacks in government and education sectors.

Instead of waiting for government or some other company to hire you, we say create your own job, start your own business. Entrepreneurship is a great option for veterans who know what it takes to succeed, but may need flexibility. That's why CAMEO's fourth annual Women Entrepreneurs Symposium focused on women veterans business owners. Over 40 women joined forces to discuss why entrepreneurship is a good option for those who serve and what are the ingredients to success.

To effectively serve veterans, we manage a peer support network for participating member organizations to discuss best practices and challenges they encounter when serving the men and women who served us. Issues discussed include: development and strengthening strategic referral partnerships with traditional veteran serving organizations, privacy around disabilities, transitioning to civilian life, and applying the skills they learned in the service towards their business.

CAMEO pioneered a pilot project in 2010 with support from AT&T and Citi – the 'Disabled Veterans Microenterprise Technical Assistance Program.' The program provided grants to six community-based business technical assistance providers. The program served a diverse population that may be more comfortable learning in their community than on a university campus. Our members served disabled veterans with programs ranging from farming to procurement assistance. The results exceeded our original expectations (see chart below right). This intensive community-based program was the first of its kind and has the potential to become a national model. In 2011-

2012 with continued funding from Citi, CAMEO continued the peer network outreach activities and strengthened our relationship with the California Department of Veteran Affairs.

CAMEO would like to expand the pilot program and peer networking to meet the growing needs of California's veteran population. We encourage our members to create programs that specifically serve veterans. We have started to develop strong strategic partnerships and referral relationships with local veteran groups. However, to be effective and scale these programs, the sector needs additional funding – and CAMEO is actively engaged in uncovering old and new sources.

Disabled Veterans Micro Enterprise Technical Assistance Program, Year 1

	Goal	Actual
Veterans Served	60	98
Businesses Served	27	46
Jobs Created	na	62
Number of Loans	na	4

THE BOSSES

Mariposa Valley Farms, Woodland, California



Vonita Murray, a veteran from the 1st Gulf War, spent over ten years working in office management before becoming a CAD Technician. She was working at an architecture firm, when she was laid off in 2009. It was the push she needed to follow her passion.

Farming/gardening is in her blood. Vonita's grandfather was a farmer in Minnesota with a 1,000+ acres of corn, soy hogs and chickens. She grew up in Colorado on three-acres with a huge garden and lots of animals.

In January of 2011, without a formal education in farming, she leased four acres of land on which she grows a variety of vegetables, fruits and flowers, including green cauliflower, yellow strawberries and purple carrots.

In April 2011, she learned about Farmer Veterans Coalition (FVC) who helped her learn about large scale crop production as well as helped build a 1000 square foot hoop house, or greenhouse.

She wants to diversify and grow as many different crops as she can manage. She operates an 8-member small Community Supported Agriculture from her farm and has plans to grow it to 50 members. She sells her produce at the local farmers market and is developing restaurant accounts. Part of her long-term plan is to give back to those who have helped her by hiring fellow veterans.

I am designing Mariposa Valley Farm to be a center of activity, where my community can come and learn what it feels like to be intimately involved with nature... and where my community, on the farm and off, grows and becomes richer.

Falcon Builders and Developers, Inc. , Fresno, CA

John Manuel Falcon spent 20 years and 6 months in the Air Force. While stationed in Las Vegas in the mid-1990's, John and his wife Marina fixed up old houses. They took on three rehab projects on section 8 housing. Providing safe homes to code, to less fortunate families gave them great pride.

John's Air Force experience included 10 years in project management. And in his last two years in the service, he went back to school under the GI bill. He graduated summa cum laude with a Bachelors of Business Administration in Management just before retiring from the Air Force in 2007.

That year, he launched **Falcon Builders and Developers, Inc.** with his wife, Marina. John saw the potential in the lucrative (but competitive) arena of government contracting and decided to capitalize on the different designations his business qualified for as a disabled veteran owned business. John found the **Central Valley Business Incubator/Small Business Development Center**, whose Rich Mostert counseled John and provided technical assistance regarding certifications for government procurement. Falcon Builders currently employs 10 people. The company has maintained revenue streams and is well positioned for future opportunities; and John is known as the "go-to" person on government contracting issues and is a leader in his local Disabled Veteran's organization.

