



WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA DISTRICT OFFICE

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Contact: Janet.Heyl@sba.gov 412-395-6560 x103
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Army National Guard Veteran Finds New Tour of Duty Lending a Hand after Disasters *Ben Weaver Lauded as Area's Veteran-Owned Small Business Person of the Year*

LORETTO, PA – Ben Weaver might not be the first person his fellow citizens call after natural and man-made disasters strike; but chances are he and his 22-person crew are very high on the list.

On May, 14, Weaver, owner of SERVPRO of Ebensburg, will be lauded as the U.S. Small Business Administration's Western Pennsylvania Veteran-Owned Small Business Person of the Year. The ceremony coincides with the nation's 56th celebration of National Small Business Week, held each May across the country.

"It's such a great honor," Weaver said. "It certainly serves as a validation we are doing things right." Weaver's award-winning nomination was submitted by the Somerset Trust Company.

Weaver and business partner Jeff Kuncelman secured their one-truck office on wheels and sales territory with a business plan and an SBA-backed 7(a) loan.

The 7(a) loan program is the agency's most-used business loan program because of its flexibility in the loan structure, variety of loan uses and availability. "Last year, in Western Pennsylvania, we disbursed 543 guaranteed loans infusing more than \$214 million into the small business community," said SBA Pittsburgh District Director Dr. Kelly Hunt.

"We each brought our expertise in sales and construction," said Weaver. "After attending an intense training seminar in Tennessee, we were certified in fire, water and mold remediation."

But it took some pavement pounding, door knocking and pro bono work before Weaver finally got that first customer.

"I attended every networking event I could and got involved in the community, which is my home," he added. "Because, in the end, people really want to do business with people they know -- their extended family."

Fate intervened when Weaver met an insurance agent during her first week on the job.

"I was there when a customer called in after a small fire," he explained. "She needed us and we were a little bit panicked but cleaned and dried out the smoke-damaged carpet," Weaver said. "Getting that experience was so helpful for both us and the homeowner."

"As an Air Force veteran and entrepreneur, I'm impressed when former military personnel transfer their leadership skills into small business ownership," added Hunt. "Their dedication is unparalleled and so is their community involvement."

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Weaver, who almost immediately began hiring more team members, surprised the community when he began donating both time and materials helping uninsured, displaced families move back into their restored homes at no cost; often landing on local television news stations.

“We never did it for the publicity,” added Weaver. “We truly wanted to help people.”

Weaver’s generosity extended past Cambria County and into Texas during the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey when he authorized his crew to give the team trailer to a family. “They were homeless and living in a tent at a campground,” Weaver explained. “Giving it to them was the easiest business decision I’ve ever made.”

Fast-forward to 2019, and Weaver now employs 22, and his fleet of 20 trucks is all housed in a 10,000-square-foot building. His equipment grew just as impressively: 400 air movers; 50 air scrubbers and 100 dehumidifiers with training spanning days for each piece of equipment. He’s expanding with a second office in Indiana, and his work family is also benefitting from the rapid growth. “We pay for a majority of healthcare costs and have a matching 401(k) plan,” he added. “My goal is to get 75 percent of my team investing in it.”

And the Weaver, who once sought the advice of others, now has other disaster-related firms flocking to him as their mentor. “Every day, I ask where my services are needed,” he explained. “I still go out with the crew making sure our focus is always on our customers.”

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About the U.S. Small Business Administration

The U.S. Small Business Administration makes the American dream of business ownership a reality. As the only go-to resource and voice for small businesses backed by the strength of the federal government, the SBA empowers entrepreneurs and small business owners with the resources and support they need to start, grow or expand their businesses, or recover from a declared disaster. It delivers services through an extensive network of SBA field offices and partnerships with public and private organizations. To learn more, visit www.sba.gov.