

Best Entrepreneur, Large Company

Efficiency Brings Expansion for Naval Ship Painting Co.

■ By EMMET PIERCE

Alan Lerchbacher, the president and CEO of Naval Coating Inc. (NCI), has been honored as best entrepreneur in the large company category of the 2017 Veteran & Military Entrepreneur Awards.

Lerchbacher said he was pleased to be surrounded by numerous colleagues from San Diego County's business and military communities when he received the award on Oct. 25 at the **Hyatt Regency La Jolla at Aventine**.

"We were super excited," he said. "I knew 30 or 40 percent of the people who were there in the room."

Lerchbacher's company paints and preserves the Navy's Pacific Fleet. The veteran served in the Navy for 26 years before starting his career in the private sector. He has been described as leader who is adept at finding cost efficiencies and growing business.

Lerchbacher acquired his company in San Diego in January 2016. It currently employs 144 people, many of whom are veterans. The veteran's management strategy has reduced monthly operating costs from as high as \$1.5 million to an average of \$800,000. This has been accomplished by renegotiating vendor relationships and finding innovative ways to conserve resources.

Part of Lerchbacher's strategy has been the development of a proprietary enterprise resource planning (ERP) and project management system, which enables employees to manage hours, supplies, tools and maintenance in real time. This helps optimize reorder and maintenance schedules.

"That is how we are able to see that we are optimizing and utilizing people in all the right areas at the right time," he explained. "It is really critical that our people get to the right place at the right time."

Building A Business

Lerchbacher has used customer engagement to establish

deeper business relationships. One project has led to another, he explained.

"It's like hockey," he said. "You score that first goal and others will follow."

His company has bid on numerous state and local projects to refurbish and enhance water treatment facilities, storage tanks, public buildings, and other infrastructure. NCI's first commercial job will be the renovation of a recreation center for the City of San Diego.

Lerchbacher noted that he has collaborated with other coating and defense subcontractors to develop partnerships.

"We have partnered with one of our previous competitors to win work in the Northwest," he said. "We will be opening an office in the Seattle area in January or February of next year."

Becoming A Mentor

The entrepreneur's experience in the ship repair industry has enabled him to mentor his own workers and industry partners. He serves as a leader at his American Legion post and within the U.S. Naval Academy Alumni Association.

At the alumni association, he helps sponsor scholarship interviews and mock job interviews for veterans who are transitioning to civilian life. NCI is a sponsor for the National Veteran Transition Services Inc. program.

The entrepreneur said finding ways to help veterans has become one of his passions.

"I am working with three guys who all want to go to the **Naval Academy**," he said. "I am working on getting them into the next class. I am working with 12 or 13 officers and enlisted men who are leaving the Navy, to find what is next for them."

He credits his wife Amy with supporting his efforts. He noted that his daughter Suzie now works with him. His son Scott is an entrepreneur in Cleveland.



Bob Thompson/Fotoworks

Alan Lerchbacher has led his company to expand to the private sector and soon to the Pacific Northwest.