

Veteran-Owned Small Business Of The Year

Charlie McCarty

Innovet, Inc.

One of the last things Charlie McCarty did before shipping out after a 13-month tour of service in Vietnam was carry a wounded platoon buddy out of the mortar-riven jungles.

Lifting his friend into a chopper for airlift to a field hospital, he leaned in close and said, "I promise I'll see you again."

It was a promise he didn't know he could keep at the time, but this spring, 47 years to the day later, McCarty kept his word when the two finally met up on a trip to Washington, D.C.

Talk with anyone who knows McCarty, president of Innovet – one of the state's leading service-disabled veteran-owned small businesses (SDVOSB) – and the first thing they'll tell you is that the incident personifies everything the man is: honest to a fault, true to his word. "He's absolutely the nicest guy in the world," they say, and they mean it.

Indeed, the for-profit Innovet, which grossed over \$14 million last year, stands out as much for McCarty's personality as for its business model and high-quality service. The genial veteran, who routinely employs several veterans, would just as soon shoot the breeze about baseball and your grandkids as talk about business – which he happily admits bores him.

But McCarty's easy charm belies a long and sometimes difficult path from the battlefield to a successful business. When the combat-wounded and decorated veteran came home in 1968, he encountered both war protesters and flashbacks of the jungles he'd left behind. Hallucinations of comrades lost in battle dogged him for years, and, like many fellow vets, he struggled to find his footing and was intermittently unemployed despite his Navy Commendation Medal for heroism. Eventually he happened into some electrical work. Over time he got enough jobs to learn the trade and become good at it. In 1997 he started his first business, Mac Power, not long after becoming a licensed electrician.

But he soon realized that while he loved

running a business, the tedious management tasks it entails were not for him.

"The paperwork, the taxes, the quarterly reports," he laughs. "I hated it! I'd rather be out and out, developing new business."

Six years ago he approached two colleagues, and together they merged Mac Power with Extel Communications to form Innovet, which, as an SDVOSB, has since focused on installing electrical systems in VA and other government facilities. Typically half of Innovet's eight field electricians are veterans, and some are combat-disabled.

Today he chalks the company's success up to the fact that he just does what he does as well as he can. "I just try to be straight with people and deliver good service at a fair price. That's all people want."

The best advice he ever got, he recalls, came from an unlikely source.

"Thirty years ago I sometimes performed as a magician at a South County club. Sometimes I shared billing with a master hypnotist named Harry Monti, and we became friends. One day he told me: 'Charlie, always be sincere and honest; treat people with respect. Don't BS people, and don't lie to them. If you do that, you can sleep well.' I've always remembered that and tried to live by it."

He credits the SBA with inspiring an ongoing joy in business development, an area for which he feels a particular calling.

"One of the things I've learned along the way is that you have to touch people," he says. "Pressing the flesh with referrals and contacts, creating networks of partners and collaborators, and just genuinely caring about people – that's how I've built this business."

Now well into his sixties, he says retirement holds no attraction for him.

"I love coming in to work," he says. "I have two great business partners; we have a great time. I just like working with good people. I no longer work in the field, and sometimes I do miss just getting in there and fooling around with wires." ■

