

Camille Howe

Camille Howe Cleaning Service

BY JEREMY CULLIMORE



(left - right) Takiyah Carr and Camille Howe. Photo by Andrew Lightman

When one of her largest contracts to date unexpectedly ended last year, Camille Howe wasted no time ensuring her business, Camille Howe Cleaning Service (CHCS), kept on rolling. To keep her company profitable and viable, Howe did what she does best – she simply made it work. No ifs, ands or buts about it.

Howe started CHCS to provide janitorial services to commercial and government agencies in 1998. For the past 12 years, she's worked to take CHCS from a fledgling start-up to a successful small business with almost half a million dollars in revenue – servicing contracts with the Districts Department of Mental Health, US Army Corps of

Engineers and Amtrak.

Forging ahead through the tough economy, Howe had to be creative, fast acting and able to turn her business on a dime. She created an aggressive strategy to market her business to new contracts.

In addition to providing office cleaning, carpet cleaning, floor maintenance, wall washing and window cleaning for large agencies and companies, CHCS looked to expand into the residential arena. The new service would boost sales, bringing stability in profits and cash flow to her company.

As founder and president of CHCS, Howe has over 20 years experience in the janitorial service industry. She's armed with a mass of technical and hands-on know-how knowledge

in contract administration, personnel management, quality control and assurance training, implementation, and performance monitoring from managing a staff of over 100 employees and multiple contracts.

Like a child that follows in the footsteps of its parents, CHCS takes after Howe's natural drive and ability to make things work. In the face of obstacles that the harsh world of business throws, Howe knows which lever to pull and button to push.

CHCS has posted consistently smooth financial performances, even under the umbrella of this cold and objectively stubborn economy. With decreased revenue from previously solid sources over 2006 to 2007, Howe worked in lock step

form to cut expenses to still yield a healthy net income.

CHCS reacted by changing the manner in which they performed their service and internalized work to reduce overhead.

The tight economic conditions of 2008 and 2009 brought consolidations and cost cutting at the government and firm level, CHCS's bread and butter. With less flexibility to maneuver revenue replacements and doing what she could to cost cut and consolidate on her end is when Howe made the decision to expand the company into residential cleaning as a means to provide a new stream of income.

Howe is a savvy small business woman that relentlessly creates opportunities. CHCS has been responsible for growing its revenue lines – reinvesting retained earnings and creating jobs for the District of Columbia.

To help roll out her campaign to expand into new contracts and markets, Howe became a Certified Business Enterprise (CBE) through the District's Department of Small and Local Business Development (DSLBD) and applied to their micro-loan program. The Washington Area Community Investment Fund Inc. (WACIF), who manages the program for the city, awarded CHCS a micro-loan and worked with Howe to make sure she was on solid ground to accomplish her goals.

With a micro-loan from WACIF and DSLBD, CHCS was able to add to its line of services to replace lost revenue, buy equipment and go after more government contracts. She is committed to gaining larger company clients, particularly GSA contracts for which WACIF's financial and technical help will assist her in bidding.

Camille Howe Cleaning Service is located at 3200 Buena Vista Terrace SE and can be contacted at 202-584-5612.

Jeremy Cullimore is project manager for WACIF. Call 202-529-5505 or visit www.wacif.org for more information. ★