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Chamber's MWBE Loan Program Helps Companies Secure ISO Certification

BY MICHAEL WADDELL, Special to The Daily News

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A cohort of minority-owned businesses have used a new Greater Memphis Chamber loan program to complete ISO 9001 certification, which opens them up to new federal contracting opportunities where the certification is required.

“The ISO certification gives us a competitive advantage as a small firm, and it’s a great recruitment tool,” said Allworld Project Management chief administrative officer [Brent Hooks](#).

Allworld, established in 2010 by Michael Hooks Jr., has grown since then to count 42 full-time employees today.

“We primarily assist architects and engineers on civil and environmental construction projects, but we’re not limited to those projects,” Brent Hooks said. “We’re placing a concentrated focus on GIS (Geographical Information Systems) or digital mapping, and we also provide engineering support services, community and economic planning, along with construction administration.”

The chamber chose six companies for its first cohort of the Minority and Women-Owned Businesses (MWBE) loan program.

The program provides ISO, or International Organization Standardization, training that could cost a company as much as \$35,000 to obtain, according to the chamber.

By combining the training for six different companies, the chamber was able to reduce that cost and, with the help of partners, establish a \$15,000 forgivable loan program to eligible companies. Companies that complete the training, certification and evaluations have the total amount of the loan forgiven.



Dr. Donn Fisher, executive director and CEO of the Mid-South Quality Productivity Center, and Kelly Rayne, senior vice president with the Greater Memphis Chamber. The center is a partner with the chamber on an ISO certification loan program.

(Daily News/Andrew J. Breig)

RECORD TOTALS	DAY	WEEK	YEAR
PROPERTY SALES	76	133	2,171
MORTGAGES	53	104	1,455
FORECLOSURE NOTICES	6	11	187
BUILDING PERMITS	176	319	4,645
BANKRUPTCIES	23	64	833
BUSINESS LICENSES	0	0	381
UTILITY CONNECTIONS	0	0	0
MARRIAGE LICENSES	0	0	0

“Companies who are ISO certified can compete and receive more lucrative contracts from government agencies and many of the larger companies that require their vendors to be ISO certified,” Phil Trenary, president and CEO of the chamber, said. “The ISO certification also gives companies the opportunity to open new markets and compete globally.”

ISO is an internationally recognized business management system that adheres to standards for world-class specifications for products, services and systems to ensure quality, safety and efficiency. There are more than 1 million companies and organizations in more than 170 countries certified to ISO 9001.

The standard is based on a number of quality management principles, including a strong customer focus and having motivated top managers.

Another Memphis company in the first cohort was [Madison Group Inc.](#), a telecommunications company that handles installations for central offices of small telephone companies across the country.

“In the telecommunications industry, the larger companies are interested and ask for us to be ISO-certified,” said Madison Group co-owner [Martha Pitts](#), who attended the training along with one of her employees. “The chamber is really helping small businesses, providing the best trainers in the city and absolutely making it easy for us.”

Madison Group, which just celebrated its 25th anniversary, has seven full-time employees, contracting out a large amount of installation work, and is licensed in 30 states.

“Because we had a large contract with a company to provide materials, we were looking into ISO,” Pitts said. “One great thing that came out of this is that it made me look at every process in the company as they pertain to our goals, and it helped us improve the processes.”

In manufacturing, companies must be ISO-certified, but it has only seeped into the general service industry recently, according to Pitts.

Allworld, which has worked on high-profile local projects like the Main Street to Main Street multi-modal connector via the Harahan Bridge, Crosstown Concourse, the Patriot Lake expansion at [Shelby Farms Park](#), the new TVA Allen plant and the 10-year, \$250 million Memphis Sewer Assessment Rehabilitation Program, must maintain its ISO certification in years to come or lose the loan amount.

ISO 9001 can be used by any organization, large or small, regardless of its field of activity.

“What this certification does is allow us to go out and approach larger engineering firms and companies with an added level of credibility,” said Allworld senior engineering coordinator [James Simpson](#). “It also helps us to establish policies and procedures as we are successful in pursuing this type of work with other companies to better manage ourselves as we continue to grow.”

The MWBE loan program is funded in part by the Assisi Foundation of Memphis, and along with the chamber, partners include the Mid-South Quality Productivity Center.

Other participating companies in the first cohort of ISO training included [Clarion Security LLC](#), [Stragistics Technology Inc.](#), Lyons Textile Restorations (Lyons Cleaners) and [Tec-Print LLC](#).