

# Business Watch

## SBA honors Gatewood

By Aruna Jain  
Staff Writer

Not long after former Marine Wayne Gatewood started his federal contracting company, Quality Support Inc., in 1989, he decided to apply for the 8(a) Business Development Program with the U.S. Small Business Administration.

Quality Support, a technical, management and administrative support services firm in Landover, was accepted into the program in 1994. Since then, Gatewood has grown from having just one federal contract to securing more than 10 contracts totaling close to \$21 million through the program, which helps firms owned by socially or economically disadvantaged individuals do business with the federal government.

Quality Support's services include conference and event planning, staffing and call center management.

As the SBA celebrates National Minority Enterprise Development Week, Sept. 29 through Oct. 3, Gatewood's business will be awarded the 8(a) Graduate of the Year award.

The business development program "gives you access to the marketplace that otherwise would not be available to you," Gatewood said. "We never could have gotten a start without it."

Quality Support has contracts with the departments of the Army, Navy, Commerce, Health and Human Services, and Housing and Urban Development, among others.

The company also contracts with private companies, including Laurel's Spherix Inc. and UNISYS of Pennsylvania.

Gatewood would not disclose his privately held company's revenues but said they have grown annually since the company started.

The Washington Metropolitan District office of the SBA handles the lion's share of 8(a) firms because so many federal agencies are headquartered in this area, spokeswoman Sheila Thomas said.

"It's not intended to be an end-all program, but the 8(a) program is another bite at the apple," Thomas said. "[Businesses] have another tool in their arsenal when they want



Allison Pasek/Gazette

**Quality Support CEO Wayne Gatewood started his Landover-based company in 1989, two years after retiring from the Marines. Quality Support, a small minority-owned business, has won many federal contracts in administrative, managerial and technical services. The company is a recent graduate of the federal SBA 8(a) program.**

to compete for a federal contract."

Gatewood started his businesses after serving 21 years in the Marine Corps. His father lent him \$600 to start the business, and the company now has 90 full-time employees and 112 total employees in Landover, Aberdeen and Oakland, Calif.

The program has helped his business so much that Gatewood now mentors other 8(a) firms on an informal basis.

One of the program's biggest benefits for Gatewood: teaching him how to figure all his expenses and account for them when billing clients.

The SBA teaches how to set rates to include overhead costs, fringe benefits and general administrative costs — expenses often overlooked by new companies.

"You need to know how to come up with a billing rate that covers all of that," Gatewood said.

Despite the program's advantages, Gatewood said that working with the federal government has its ups and downs. Sometimes, the government is late paying his company, and with the war in Iraq, a shift in government funding has prompted some

federal contractors to scramble to meet new government needs.

"The war changed things, and it's not as easy to identify where contract dollars are going," he said.

Gatewood said that when he started his company, getting federal contracts was a matter of "cold-calling and convincing people to give me a try." While 8(a) helped create access, challenges still remain, he said.

"SBA is here to give you guidance, not to get you contracts," Gatewood said. "You better be out there knocking on doors. They give you the tools — you better do the work."

### SBA 8(a) Program

**What:** Businesses interested in applying for the 8(a) program may attend a monthly eligibility briefing at the SBA regional office in Northwest D.C.

**Info:** For further information, please call 202-606-4000, or visit [www.sba.gov/dc](http://www.sba.gov/dc) to see the schedule.

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