

Almost 30 S. Florida firms recognized among top women-owned companies

By Marcia Heroux Pounds
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Nearly 30 South Florida businesses made the Div500, DiversityBusiness.com's 2006 list of the top U.S. women-owned firms.

Local companies topping the list include Delray Beach-based software company Yurcor, Dania Beach marketing firm Starmark International, and Boca Raton staffing firm CareersUSA Inc.

Major corporations, government agencies and universities that do business with multicultural and women-owned businesses use the list, according to DiversityBusiness.com, which links large organizational buyers to multicultural products and services. Buyers and suppliers pay an annual membership fee.

DiversityBusiness.com does not explain in its press release how it chose the top women-owned businesses and could not be reached for an interview Tuesday.

CareersUSA founder and chief executive Marilyn Ounjian said DiversityBusiness.com's list of women-owned and diversity-owned firms is critical to minority businesses. If you're not on the list, she said, "there are large Fortune 500 employers in the U.S. that will not do business with you."

"It's a door opener. It gets us through the red tape of becoming a diversified vendor," she said.

Competitor Sue Romanos of CareerXchange Inc. agrees. "It's important to the client. So many companies are into implementing diversity today. They're looking for diversity vendors."

Such lists highlight the visible players, but the rankings are not always reliable, said Alan Carsrud, director of the Global Entrepreneurship Institute at Florida International University in Miami. "You have to take a critical eye and not say these are absolutely and totally correct. But it does say that women-owned businesses are important."

The list also points out the sometimes-evolving ownership of women in businesses.

CareerXchange, in Pembroke Pines and Miami, is owned by two women and a man: Romanos, Suzanne Hodes and Nick Alonso Jr. CareersUSA was founded by Ounjian, but today involves the entire family including her husband, George, daughters Jennifer and Kori, and son, Jonathan.

Yet two men are listed on the Div500 among principals of top-10 South Florida women-owned businesses.

Greg Guiteras is listed as the principal of Lorraine Travel Bureau in Coral Gables. "Mom is the majority shareholder," he explained. "My mother and father started the travel company together in 1948. ... They're still working on it after 58 years."

But a South Florida roofing company on the Div500 said it is not woman-owned.

Tom Milanese, president of Triple M Roofing Corp. in Fort Lauderdale, said the listing might be related to his mother, Patricia Milanese, who is treasurer. She doesn't run the company, Milanese said. "I don't know why we're listed on it," he said.

The top U.S. woman-owned business is a travel company, Omega World Travel in Fairfax, Va., according to the Div500.

In Florida, the largest woman-owned business is listed as Yurcor in Delray Beach, with \$47 million in annual revenues. Karina Bahr is president. In Broward County, the biggest women-owned business is Starmark

International, a marketing business that was owned by Peggy Nordeen before a merger earlier this week. Nordeen remains president of Starmark/Marc USA, which continues to operate in Dania Beach.

The listing "gets you noticed" for government agency contract work, Nordeen said. Starmark has a contract with the federal Government Services Agency among its yearly \$45 million in billings.

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