

IN THE NEWS

BACKING VETS

SBA LOANS ARE GIVING PATRIOTS A HELPING HAND

PROGRAM HELPS VETERANS GROW BUSINESSES

By Warren Allen SPECIAL TO THE WORCESTER TELEGRAM & GAZETTE

Christopher G. Ceddia was fresh out of Northeastern University in 1991 with a degree in engineering and a lot of bills.

Mr. Ceddia enlisted in the U.S. Navy. He served 16 months during the Gulf War, and developed skills in computer and communications equipment while attached to the staff of the Commander of the U.S. Naval Forces Central Command stationed in Bahrain.

Today, Mr. Ceddia lives in Hopkinton and works as vice president for Security Construction Services Inc., a Hudson-based federal contractor that manages construction projects and operates a security fence division that sets up everything from simple residential enclosures to crash-barrier, anti-terrorist fencing.

His wife, Janet B. Ceddia, owns the company. The two have worked side by side since they established Security Construction Services in 2002. Over that time, the company has grown, thanks to its status as a certified woman-owned and disadvantaged business.

But the Ceddias worried about whether they could afford to make their company grow without overextending themselves.

Yet 17 years after Mr. Ceddia enlisted, he found his military service opening up new possibilities for his business. Through the U.S. Small Business Administration's Patriot Express Pilot Loan Initiative and with the help of an SBA liaison and Middlesex Savings Bank Vice President Meghan Liddy, the Ceddias were able to quickly secure a Patriot Express loan with a copy of Mr. Ceddia's discharge papers and company records, tax returns and financial statements.



From left, Security Construction Services co-owners Christopher and Janet Ceddia, with their banker, Meghan Liddy, of Middlesex Savings Bank. They are shown in the Hudson company's shop, with woodworker Eduardo Becker in the background. Photo courtesy of the Telegram & Gazette.

"It was one of the easiest banking situations I've ever encountered," he said. "I've never seen anything like it. It was flawlessly smooth."

Established a year ago, the Patriot Express program helps veterans who are either starting or trying to build up a small business. The loans feature fast approval and amounts of up to \$500,000 from voluntary lenders. Eligible are veterans, service-disabled veterans, active duty service members participating in the military's Transition Assistance Program, Reservists and National Guard members, their current spouses as well as the widowed spouse of a service member or veteran who died during service or of a service-connected disability.

"First and foremost, it's given me peace of mind," said Mrs. Ceddia, "because I know I can continue to grow without running out of cash. That's the challenge with growth — it takes money. And so, it's given me a ton of peace of mind. I'm sure it's given me an edge on the competition that doesn't have access to that kind of capital."

