

## Supplier gains with certified status

### EXECUTIVE SUITE

BY CHRISTINE GIORDANO  
Special to Newsday

Getting certified in New York State as a woman-owned business enterprise (WBE) helped Deborah Ehmann, owner and CEO of East Coast Metallic Tubing & Hardware Supply Corp. in Ronkonkoma, increase her sales from less than \$120,000 to \$400,000 in a year and a half. "It's helped my business grow tremendously, because it's opened other doors for me," she said. Under a state initiative that encourages state project contractors to give 20 percent of contracts to minority and women entrepreneurs, doing business with Ehmann helps large bidders meet those guidelines.

Ehmann, 54, started her business in 2001 as a stay-at-home mom selling supplies to one cable company. Once her children were old enough, she was ready to grow. It took her 18 months to get her WBE designation, but since then she has doubled her office space, leased two warehouses and hired two employees.

#### Other than being a WBE, how did you boost your sales so rapidly?

I joined every organization and go to outreach events. I'm in East End Women's Network, HIA-LI, the National Association of Professional Women, Women Economic Developers of Long Island, the Long Island Forum for Technology . . . I'm also doing a 2,000-piece mailing. From my first mailing of 500, I got a lot of phone calls, with [bites from] two major electrical contractors. It really was worth it. It's also worth it to show up at walk-throughs, to walk the potential job site . . . And go to bid openings to see what the competition bids.

#### What else gives you an edge?

The warehouse space and getting \$5 million in bonding put me over the edge from my competition. I can house my products in the warehouse and deliver them to my customers when they need it. And more and more are requiring to see my office



Deborah Ehmann credits her woman-owned-business designation as a big help.

### CORPORATE snapshot

**NAME:** Deborah Ehmann, owner and chief executive of East Coast Metallic Tubing & Hardware Supply Corp. in Ronkonkoma

**WHAT IT DOES:** Supplier of electrical and cable products

**EMPLOYEES:** 2

**REVENUE:** About \$400,000

with me. They've been burned in the past with WBEs that say they have it, but don't.

#### What's your advice to a young woman considering starting a business?

Choose something you know about and like doing. Get certified, go through the process and get NYS certified as a woman-owned business. That's the key to growth right now. And get as many certifications and designations as you can, because they're only going to open more doors each time. But the certifications alone aren't enough. Show up at every event, join organizations, use the Small Business Development Centers. Meet with the people, take them to lunch. I go to an event and I don't eat — I don't want to waste time.

#### What's your vision for the future?

My company could explode this year because of all of the years I've spent setting it up. Today I can take on any size job that comes my way. A

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