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FALL 2013

Melvin E. Clark Exhibits **THE WILL TO WIN**

By Jordan Taylor



Melvin E. Clark, CEO of G.W. Peoples Contracting

A British novelist said, “If you have the will to win, you have achieved half your success; if you don’t, you have achieved half your failure.” Throughout his academic, professional and entrepreneurial journey, Melvin E. Clark, Chief Executive Officer of G.W. Peoples Contracting Co. has exhibited the will to win.

“I am chairman, CEO and owner of G.W. Peoples Contracting. We are the only African American-owned firm in the country that builds railroads,” Clark said. “This fact simply underscores the problems encountered and the progress that has yet to be made if we—minority and women-owned businesses—are to play a meaningful role in building and rehabilitating the transportation infrastructure in America. We have a corporate—and I have a personal—commitment to ensure that our workforce reflects the communities and the ridership that the transit system serves.”

Three decades ago, Clark entered the railroad industry because he saw an opportunity – and had the undeterred will to win. Clark said he realized that millions of dollars were being spent in the rail industry and nobody was there to service the needs of the industry. “The only thing I did not have was the technical expertise,” Clark said. Equipped with the necessary business acumen, he collaborated with a business partner and launched the venture Metroplex to begin pursuing contracts. The company’s first major project was a \$5 million job at Camp LeJeune in North Carolina. Clark said from start to finish, the priority was on quality work, as opposed to immediate profits. After successfully completing the project and receiving 8(a) certification through the Small Business Administration, the team negotiated a new \$7 million contract with Camp LeJeune and grew from that point. Clark credits his father with helping launch the company and providing much-needed financial support and encouragement. “He didn’t understand what I was doing, but he had confidence in me,” Clark said.

Metroplex was founded in 1983 and over the years, developed into the premier minority rail construction contractor in the United States. Under Clark's leadership, Metroplex established a national reputation of excellence. It was sold to the British construction and engineering firm, Balfour Beatty in 2000. At the time of sale, Metroplex was actively performing on projects such as the Alameda Corridor Project in Los Angeles (\$65 Million); the Bay Area Rapid Transit Project in San Francisco (\$40 Million); and the Southern New Jersey Light Rail System in Camden, New Jersey (\$55 Million), which were, at that time, the largest transit construction projects in the country.

Clark has been at the helm of G.W. Peoples Contracting Co. for the past three years. The company is a DBE/MBE/SBE certified railroad contractor that provides new track construction, rehabilitation, maintenance, repair and removal. Capabilities also include heavy and light rail, at-grade road crossings, rail and transit right-of-way, railroad bridges and all related site activities.

Like many DBEs—within any industry and of all sizes—Clark said that the greatest challenges have been financing, bonding and acceptance in the industry. However, he has employed several success strategies to overcome those obstacles. Clark said it's important to be surrounded by people who are smarter than you and who are committed to the business owner and the business vision because, "you can't do everything yourself."

Clark holds a degree in accounting from Pennsylvania State University, a law degree from the Northwestern University School of Law and a Master's Degree from the Northwestern University Graduate School of Management. While attending Northwestern University, Clark also was employed as a labor consultant to Chicago United, where he developed a plan for increasing minority participation in the construction trades industry.

During the Clinton Administration, Clark recommended and formulated the creation of the SBA's Mentor-Protégé Program, whereby minority 8(a) companies could be mentored by larger companies to compete in today's marketplace. Today, the SBA's Mentor-Protégé program has been replicated throughout the federal agency system. Metroplex and G.W. Peoples signed the first Mentor-Protégé Agreement with the SBA.

Clark said he is very proud of the company, the team and the work that has been done throughout his career. Some of the current featured projects for G.W. Peoples include:

Atlanta Streetcar Project

G.W. Peoples Contracting (GWP) is a subcontractor to URS Corporation on the project, constructing the center city Downtown Loop of the Atlanta Streetcar System, a \$69.2 million design/build interoperable/connectable project that includes 12 stations and running track that can eventually support and connect to light rail transit. On a \$4.3 million subcontract to URS, GWP is furnishing materials, equipment and labor to install almost three miles of embedded and specialty track. This includes ballasting, clips, fasteners, steel ties, turnouts, storage tracks, switches and specialty hardware in accordance to standards specified in the design. [Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA)]

"Ensuring fairness and diversity among those projects that receive taxpayer dollars and demanding accountability from the recipients of those funds is a fundamental role of the government, and we believe that what is good for every other agency under the purview of the U.S. Department of Transportation should be good for the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA). In addition to being a pragmatic political stand, it just makes for good public policy and practical business sense. We recommend an Executive Order to mandate inclusion of minority and disadvantaged groups across all U.S. DOT contracts, including those funded under the FRA."

—G.W. Peoples Contracting Co.

Metro Silver Line WMATA Rail Extension (Phase 1)

GWP is a subcontractor to Bechtel Corporation on a \$3.4 million project for new rail construction on the 11-mile Metropolitan Washington Airport Authority/WMATA Dulles International Airport Corridor Metrorail Project. Dubbed the Silver Line, the contract includes acquisition and installation of 31,000 fasteners, 62,000 epoxy-coated inserts and installation of track. [Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA)]



Work on the WMATA Silver Line represents G.W. Peoples' largest contract to date.

Metro Silver Line WMATA Rail Extension (Phase 2)

GWP was recently selected to perform rail work on Phase 2 of the Silver Line Extension under Capital Rail Constructors, a joint venture of Clark Construction and Kiewit Infrastructure. This job represents the company's largest contract to date and will consist of installing more than 16 miles of double-track rail line from Washington, DC to the Dulles International Airport in northern Virginia.



G.W. Peoples was subcontracted to provide all labor, equipment, material and supervision for the Chicago Transit Authority Red Line.

CTA Dan Ryan Red Line Track Renewal

The Chicago Transit Authority hired Kiewit Infrastructure to completely rebuild the tracks along the south Red Line from Cermak/Chinatown to 95th/Dan Ryan in one of the largest reconstruction projects in the CTA's history, generating a multimillion-dollar investment in both

Chicago's South Side and the backbone of the CTA rail system. The project is part of more than \$1 billion in federal, state and local funds being invested in the Red Line—the system's busiest route—to upgrade track and drainage systems, renovate stations and rebuild yards. G.W. Peoples is subcontracted with Kiewit to provide all labor, equipment, material and supervision, performing work valued at more than \$9 million. The overall estimated budget for the track project—including design, construction and additional CTA service—is \$425 million. Working with the Chicago Urban League, community organizations and area churches, G.W. Peoples also developed a workforce approximating 70 percent for minority participation. [Chicago Transit Authority (CTA)]

Despite the company's success, Clark still believes that the industry as a whole has a long way to go. For years, he has been a proponent and advocate for greater inclusion efforts and DBE participation goals for the Federal Railroad Administration. He recently presented a document to the Congressional Black Caucus Council for Transportation & Infrastructure Diversity, recommending a mandate of inclusion for DBEs related to all U.S. Department of Transportation contracts and provisions that establish DBE participation goals for each phase of a project to include engineering, design and construction within each discipline. A longtime member of the Conference of Minority Transportation Officials (COMTO), Clark said, "Goals should be set for every phase and every competency. This is something that's simply fair and it makes sense." He said

implementation of those recommendations would immediately result in billions of dollars of work and thousands of jobs at prevailing wage rates (\$20 per hour and up).

It is often quoted that success is a journey, not a destination. Moving forward, G.W. Peoples Contracting has a 5-year, \$50 million growth, development and minority business joint venture plan. Where there's a will, there's a way, and CEO Melvin Clark has certainly demonstrated the way and the will to win. "Our story is a good one. We're trying to make a positive difference in this industry and a positive difference in this world," Clark said. ★



Melvin Clark (3rd from left) joins the construction crew onsite at the Atlanta Streetcar Project.



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