

Statement

of

Mr. William (Bill) Levine

On the

Veterans Business Outreach Program

Of the

NYS Small Business Development Center

Before the

Senate Small Business Committee

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Mr. Chairman, Members of the committee, my name is Bill Levine of WL Concepts & Production, Inc New York. I'm a veteran and a past client of the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) and I appreciate the opportunity to testify today.

OVERVIEW OF THE NEW YORK STATE SBDC VBOP PROGRAM

The Veteran's Business Outreach Program (VBOP)—one of four original pilot programs in the United States, was funded through the SBA's Office of Veterans' Business Development—and launched in September 1999. This highly successful program will complete its ninth year in September 2008. The VBOP program provides *targeted* business counseling and training directed toward veterans with a *priority for service-related disabilities*. The program consists of a Statewide Coordinator on Long Island, and VBOP dedicated Business Advisers at Centers (VBOC) co-located with the Farmingdale SBDC, the Albany SBDC, and the Buffalo SBDC. The program includes business counseling, research and training to assist veteran start-ups and existing veteran-owned businesses to obtain long-term success.

I truly know only one of the four VBOP programs, the one in NY, but my SBDC Advisor, retired naval Captain John Narciso, networks with all of the programs and he speaks highly of them and I respect his judgment. In NY, before I speak about my experience, the SBDC assists over 100 vets each month, plus 10 disabled vets, with one-on-one business advisement. Over the last four years, 40 of those vets each month were impacted by jobs saved or created, that's batting almost 400 and a guaranteed Hall of Fame career trip to Cooperstown, NY.

These vets accessed capital, usually with an SBA guarantee, at a rate of almost \$1,500,000 each month or an investment of \$35,000/job. I think this is important because giving owners and workers appropriate levels of capital increases their productivity and ensures that we can compete in the domestic and global economies.

## GENERAL INFORMATION

Other key activities provided by VBOP are the outreach and training programs. Usually, about 1,000 vets a year participate in one or more of these specialized training



events. The event pictured here included 125 veterans in the Syracuse area who spent four hours speaking with vet service programs interested in meeting veteran needs.

In NY, there is a focus upon the regional Veteran's network, the *Albany SBDC's* VBOP Business Advisor has been a monthly speaker at the Navy's Transition Assistance Programs with SBA Veteran's Officer Dan O'Connell the SBA Veterans' Advocate. The program has expanded significantly due to the large numbers of Veterans coming through the area following current deployments. The VBOP Business Advisor has placed focus on the reserve units, activated from the region in response to the ongoing conflicts. Reservists often represent a demographic match with successful entrepreneurs and their leadership qualities, willingness to accept risk and training help contribute to that success.

One recent veteran honored the assistance he received from the SBDC by recognizing the program on his car, a clear sign of his enthusiasm and appreciation. The following picture was sent to the SBDC after he rejoined his vocation:



Another important ancillary program of the New York program has been the Veterans Behind Bars (VB<sup>2</sup>) initiative. The Veterans Behind Bars initiative has been operating for seven years in partnership with the New York State Department of Correctional Services and is directed at veterans who are within three years of release or parole from a NYS Correctional Institution. It was started on a pilot basis at two medium-security facilities—Arthurkill on Staten Island, and Groveland near Rochester. The Arthurkill program was suspended after the retirement of the person who founded the veteran TAP program there.

Under the VB<sup>2</sup> initiative, SBDC business advisers provide business planning seminars and business plan preparation workshops to incarcerated veterans who sign up for the program. The goal is to equip veterans with the tools they need to start a business, once released. Over 700 veteran inmates have completed from the combined programs. The VBOP Business Adviser, based at the Albany SBDC, performs outreach to veterans at the McGregor and Cobleskill Correctional Facilities. In the VB<sup>2</sup> locations, the SBDC has donated basic business reference libraries for use by veterans. Additional locations are seeking participation in the Veterans Behind Bars program if funding becomes available. The total program costs for this effort is less than the incarceration costs of one inmate for 1 year, so that a 1% drop in parolee recidivism would create a positive return.

An innovative development from the New York VBOP has been a special Web-based or CD-ROM-based interactive educational program that helps teach veterans the basic business skills necessary to be successful entrepreneur or small business owner. EntreSkills<sup>®</sup> for Veterans is based on the very successful EntreSkills<sup>®</sup> program developed over four years by the NYS/SBDC's Office of Entrepreneurial Education. The original EntreSkills<sup>®</sup> program has been implemented in over 250 high schools and middle schools across New York. VBOP Business Advisors re-engineered the material to upgrade content and make it appropriate for veterans and active military personnel. EntreSkills<sup>®</sup> for Veterans takes veterans through the cumulative stages of developing a small business concept, addresses legal and marketing issues, helps prepare financial statements, and, ultimately, allows them to build a business plan suitable for financing. EntreSkills<sup>®</sup> for Veterans is available for veterans unable to participate in more traditional environments.

The NYS SBDC VBOP program has great partners in delivering the services.

The US Department of Veteran Affairs  
The New York State Division of Veteran Affairs  
U.S. Department of Labor, Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS)  
NYS Department of Labor  
New York State Division of Military and Naval Affairs  
US SBA

As you can see VBOP and the SBDC just makes good sense for America's veterans.