

Monetizing THE Military

Photography by Byron Jones



W

BY JASON BRADY

hen Brian Kent retired from the Army in 2005, he knew he couldn't work for another defense contractor. During his 20-year stint, Kent spent

much of his time in the special operations community and his last two assignments were as a project manager, a government acquisition officer in Army parlance. At one point he was responsible for 26 programs totaling more than \$160 million of budgeted funding.

Federal regulations require that government employees buying goods and services from civilian contractors undergo a "cooling off" period before they can accept employment from those vendors after retiring from the military. The length

of cooling off depends on the amount of money they spent.

"I had given money to just about everybody as an acquisition officer. I couldn't work for anyone," he said, referring to the hundreds of companies who do business with the military at Fort Bragg.

So Kent, with a master's degree in technology management from Murray State University in western Kentucky, started his civilian career as a technology consultant, identifying emerging information and biometric technologies and presenting them to government clients.

However, in 2007 Kent took his idea for a company to the Defense & Security Technology Accelerator and one year later K3 Enterprises became the first company to graduate from



the publicly funded business accelerator, which is tasked to help entrepreneurs and innovators develop new businesses and dual-use technologies.

Today, his service-disabled veteran-owned company employs 30 people in the Fayetteville area alone, and at the time of this interview the company's website sought to recruit 15 more positions to include website and database administrators, systems and network engineers and advanced paramedic instructors. Three of Kent's employees are Raleigh residents who make the trek to Fayetteville every day. "I get resumes from Raleigh all the time," he said.

While the third floor of the Festival Park building in downtown Fayetteville houses his flag ship offices, K3 Enterprises is also located in Rosslyn, Va., and Tampa, Fla., and Kent is working to establish a presence in the Chesapeake/Tidewater area of Virginia.

The company's earnings have grown from \$300,000 in

the community. In 2010, he ran for a seat in the North Carolina General Assembly and since has immersed himself in a number of civic programs, from serving on the legislative committee of the Chamber of Commerce to the business and economic advisory board at Fayetteville State University.

He believes his loss in the 2010 primary for the 44th House seat was a blessing since his business doubled soon after and it required more of his time. This year alone, Kent traveled more than 28,000 air miles in commercial aircraft flying to California and Europe. In November alone, he made eight trips to Washington, DC, spending 80 hours in a car.

Obviously travel is a major component of his business structure, so he recently bought his own six-seat Cessna 340 airplane. Always the entrepreneur, Kent plans to get the appropriate licensing and make the plane pay for itself by making it available to other businesses executives who need quick

Brian Kent found a way to cash in on his military experiences and bring dollars and jobs to Fayetteville in the process

2005 to more than \$10 million in 2010, and in 2011 *Inc. Magazine* listed the company among its top 5000 fastest growing small businesses, ranking it 559th overall and 14th among North Carolina companies.

K3 Enterprises is a technology company. "We don't build anything, but every customer we have, we train or help them with new technologies or services," Kent said. The company's offerings are based on what Kent calls the 4Ts: technology introduction, technology integration, technology training and technology sustainment.

Technology introduction involves connecting a client's business strategies with appropriate technology while technology integration identifies commercial-off-the-shelf technology that can achieve desired results and solutions to problems. Technology training involves developing programs of instruction, creating training support packages, distance e-learning and game simulations and writing technical manuals. Finally, technology sustainment involves helping government and commercial clients with transitioning new technology into legacy systems and current operations.

Kent actually considered retiring in either Huntsville or Tampa, but Fayetteville's proximity to Washington DC and the fact that his wife is a Fayetteville native prompted him to be pragmatic and remain here, where he has become active in

flights to Washington, DC.

Kent says it beats having to navigate through Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport and TSA checkpoints. Having one's own plane and landing at an airport with a cup of coffee in hand reduces travel time and stress, plus the plane's two desks allow him to pull out his laptop and get an extra hour of work in while traveling.

To be a successful entrepreneur, Kent says one must first be willing to take risks. "The second thing is that you have to keep your aggressiveness to stay after it because people won't just hand you money," he said. Kent's goal for K3 Enterprises is to increase its footprint locally, nationally and internationally. Currently, he doesn't see K3 as a competitor with the bigger defense contractors, such as Lockheed or SAIC since he often partners with those companies.

The most difficult part of running his business, Kent said, is dividing his time between being the CEO and meeting with clients and remaining in Fayetteville to manage day to day operations.

He also believes that he has a responsibility to make Fayetteville and Cumberland County better, from providing decent jobs for those leaving the military and remaining in the Fayetteville area to giving his time for the community. "I want to be part of this city's revitalization and growth," he said. ☛