



NEWS

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**ILLINOIS TOLLWAY NAMED FIRST RECIPIENT OF VETERAN BUSINESS CHAMPION AWARD
BY THE ELITE SERVICE DISABLED VETERAN OWNED BUSINESS NETWORK**

Tollway recognized for commitment to providing assistance and contract opportunities for veteran-owned businesses

DOWNERS GROVE, IL – The Illinois Tollway today accepted the first-ever Veteran Business Champion Award from the Illinois Chapter of the Elite Service Disabled Veteran Owned Business (SDVOB) Network in recognition of the agency’s leadership in increasing opportunities for veteran-owned businesses to participate on Tollway projects.

Elite SDVOB Network has established the Veteran Business Champion Award to honor and recognize individuals and organizations that rise head and shoulders above their peers to promote the veteran-owned business community. The award was accepted by Tollway Board Director Neli Vazquez Rowland from the Elite SDVOB Network Illinois Chapter Board of Directors at a ceremony in Chicago on January 27.

“To be chosen as first-ever recipient of the Veteran Business Champion Award is an honor and will serve as inspiration for the Tollway,” said Vazquez Rowland. “This recognition is a reminder of the value our efforts can provide for veteran-owned businesses that want to compete and succeed.”

Through its Veterans Business Program, the Illinois Tollway has committed to support veterans by assisting them to compete for Tollway contracts for construction, professional engineering services work, as well as goods and services contracts. The Illinois Tollway hosts and participates in numerous events to support veteran-owned businesses by recruiting and increasing the number of veteran-owned firms certified to work on contracts for the Tollway and the State of Illinois.

As part of this commitment, the Tollway reviews solicitations and contracts for the inclusion of veteran goals. While state policy requires that solicitations valued at \$250,000 and above go through a goal-setting process, the Tollway practice is to consider solicitations valued at \$50,000 and above to increase opportunities for veteran participation.

Through 2016, nearly \$39 million has been paid to veteran-owned firms on Tollway contracts since the Tollway began assigning veteran goals on contracts in July 2015, which represents nearly 2 percent of the \$2.3 billion in construction and professional engineering services contract paid during this timeframe. As a result, veteran commitments have exceeded the set goals by 39 percent.

“We are better as an industry when we provide real opportunities for small, diverse and veteran-owned firms to participate,” said Illinois Tollway Executive Director Greg Bedalov. “The Tollway’s investments in diversity are intended to create access to work that helps businesses in Illinois keep going strong and lets firms hire and retain workers.”

For example, the Tollway expanded its Partnering for Growth business mentoring program in 2015 to promote partnerships to help veteran-owned professional services firms grow and succeed. In addition, building on recommendations from its Diversity Advisory Council, the agency is preparing to expand

opportunities for set-aside contracts to veteran-owned small businesses as part of its Small Business Initiative, as well as reviewing a new opportunity for construction and professional services firms to earn bid credits in return for hiring and retaining eligible veteran workers.

“The Illinois Tollway is a clear leader among state government agencies and tolling agencies nationwide in supporting veteran-owned businesses,” said John Scifers, president of the Illinois Chapter of the Elite SDVOB Network. “We are pleased to recognize the agency for its commitment to promote veteran-owned firms through contract goals and engaging stakeholders like Elite and challenging the industry to do more for veterans.”

About the Elite SDVOB Network

The Elite Service Disabled Veteran-Owned Business (SDVOB) Network is aimed at assisting veterans through the maze of paperwork, individuals, and agencies necessary for them to reach their goal of being a self-sufficient and thriving business. Veterans deserve the same opportunities as any other business and have earned the right to be professionally competing for contracts from the government they've dedicated their lives to serving.

About the Illinois Tollway

The Illinois Tollway is a user-fee system that receives no state or federal funds for maintenance and operations. The agency maintains and operates 292 miles of interstate tollways in 12 counties in Northern Illinois, including the Reagan Memorial Tollway (I-88), the Veterans Memorial Tollway (I-355), the Jane Addams Memorial Tollway (I-90), the Tri-State Tollway (I-94/I-294/I-80) and the Illinois Route 390 Tollway.

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