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## Small- and Veteran-Owned Business Benefit from Summit

Small corporations plus military veterans seeking to grow their companies plus government agencies looking to purchase goods and services equaled another winning veterans business summit sponsored Nov. 13 by the City of Perris.

The 4th Annual Small Business Summit drew 78 participants, including about 30 companies owned and operated by former members of the military. The summit, held at Perris City Hall in conjunction with the Southwest Veterans Business Resource Center, brings together government representatives with money to spend and small businesses, many owned by veterans looking to grow their bottom line.

The summit also served as a conduit for individual veterans to seek out employment opportunities at agencies like CalFire and the Riverside County Sheriff's Department, inquire about possible service-related benefits, talk to college enrollment specialists and pick up brochures detailing business possibilities.

"It's the perfect spot to match small businesses, veteran-owned businesses and procurement agents in one location," said retired Marine Al Renteria, who founded the resource center, which is housed on the City Hall Campus. "This country has 50 great states and lots of great cities but only one has gone above and beyond—that's the City of Perris. It's a solution-based entity. It's got the venue, the space, the veterans' resource center and the will to get things done."

The City leases office space to the veterans' center for \$1 a year.



Navy veteran Mike Spazafumo discusses his company during the small business summit held Nov. 13 at the City of Perris.

Perris Mayor Daryl Busch and State Rep. Jose Medina welcomed the participants to Perris. Busch, Navy veteran, said he was "very impressed by the amount of services available and the number of people taking advantage of those programs."

"I am pleased the City is able to provide this for the veterans who give our country so much," he said.

Perris Mayor Pro-Tem Rita Rogers said when she visited the summit, vendors and veterans were lined up waiting for one-on-one meetings.

"Fantastic turnout for a fantastic event," Rogers said. "A great day all the way around."

Business owners Mike Spazafumo and Scott Olpin came to Perris looking to grow their companies. Spazafumo runs a business that supports maintenance and repair operations for four state agencies. Olpin operates a company that provides furniture and fixtures to military and civilian customers. Both made the trip to Perris from Orange County.

Spazafumo is a disabled Navy veteran who spent 20 years in marketing and sales for major corporations before striking out on his own three months ago. He is a one-man business right now but plans on hiring hire veterans when the company grows. Choosing veterans makes sense—the government provides a \$5,000 incentive for each veteran hired. In addition, businesses that locate in Perris can receive other incentives to take advantage of the City's disadvantaged status.

"Veterans get thing done," Spazafumo said. "If they don't know how to do something, they will figure it out. They offer no excuses. They get things done."

Olpin hired a Special Forces veteran for his company but lost him to a job with the Transportation Security Administration. He would hire another veteran if possible, he said.

"I look to hire veterans," Olpin said. "Veterans are multi-talented. They can talk to everyone from the janitor to the general manager. They bring a skill set and can wear a lot of hats."

Perris City Councilman Al Landers, has he has done since the annual summit began, emceed the event. He said turnout at the 2014 was exceptional, proving once again that Perris is gaining a well-deserved reputation as a veteran-friendly community.

"We owe our veterans a lot," Landers said. "Because they've given us a lot."

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