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On the Cover: Grant Electric Myrtle Beach complete lights installation
Hello from the Division of Minority and Small Business Affairs,

At the beginning of 2020, most of us were excited about beginning of a new decade and anticipating a wonderful year. What a difference eight months makes.

The Merriam Webster dictionary defines *pandemic* as: *occurring over a wide geographic area and affecting an exceptionally high proportion of the population*. As you consider that definition, you cannot help but acknowledge that we are dealing with three major pandemics – an economic pandemic, a physiological/health pandemic, and a sociological pandemic.

As a nation, we are experiencing economic hardships like we have never seen in our lifetime. A recent study from the National Bureau of Economic Research shows a 36% drop in immigrant-owned businesses from February to April. That same article reported a massive 41% decline of Black owners, sidelining some 440,000 African Americans. Entrepreneurs across the board have closed some 3.3 million small businesses, at least temporarily. Now, please understand that this is not an attempt to blame any one person, any political party or social group. This is just an acknowledgement of the fact that as a nation, we have our work cut out for us as a result of this *economic pandemic*.

As I mentioned, we also have a *physiological/health pandemic*. The facts speak for themselves. Over six million confirmed COVID-19 cases and over 180 thousand COVID-19 deaths. Despite precautions and constant warnings from experts, these numbers are on the rise with no end in sight.

Lastly, our nation is in the heat of a *sociological pandemic*. Tragedies like the death of George Floyd and others who have lost their lives due to racial hostility, Latino children imprisoned in cages on the Mexican border, and Asian Americans being targeted and bullied due to the coronavirus have shown a spotlight on the cultural and social divisions that persist within U.S. society. Recently, I watched the movie Selma, which was depicted in 1965, however the actions and attitudes are reminiscent of what we’re experiencing. Regrettably, after over 50 years, social injustices are alive and well.

The SCDOT Division of Minority and Small Business Affairs is sensitive to cultural and ethnic diversity and strive to end discrimination, oppression, poverty, and other forms of social injustice. The Division is committed to addressing inequalities and systemic discrimination by promoting programs, policies and initiatives that lead to substantive and lasting changes.

We are in an ideal position to assist the people and enterprises we serve by making a genuine difference through intentionally integrating civil rights principles throughout all areas of SCDOT. By doing so we will help society recover, rebound and rise above these tragic times.

We wish you a safe and successful Fall,

Greg Davis
*Director Minority & Small Business Affairs*
MLS, Inc. Q&A

1. Tell readers a little about your business.

Our company MLS, Inc. performs Hydroseeding and Erosion Control throughout the state of South Carolina and North Carolina. We hydroseed, install silt fence, safety fence, sediment tubes and perform/install other methods of sediment and erosion control.

We are passionate and truly enjoy what we do! Not only is Sediment and Erosion Control extremely important on the environmental spectrum, we enjoy starting with a blank slate of dirt, seeding, then watching the germination and seed grow is a beautiful process.

2. How long have you been in business?

We have been in business for six years, and really enjoy what we do! We originally started out with just Stephanie, Mike, and two other employees who were relatives and have grown to currently having 14 employees. [We] can handle any job size, both large and small.

We have been a DBE and Woman-owned business since 2015. We strive every single day to offer great customer service and complete dependable, quality work. We are grateful for the opportunity to work with and have built such wonderful relationships with the Primes we work for. Primes that we work with know that MLS, Inc. is a turn-key Erosion Control company who can fulfill all of their Erosion Control needs while also helping them achieve their DBE goal.

3. What service(s) do you offer?

We provide landscaping, erosion control installation and inspection including silt fence, sediment tubes, and rip rap. We are a supplier of mulch, dirt, gravel, local hauling; seeding, hydroseeding, and sodding.

Our daily operations include, but are not limited to: visiting project sites (both current and potential), attending pre-bid and pre-construction meetings; [we] effectively schedule projects and employees, communicating with Primes and SCDOT representatives, preparing bids and proposals, and much more.

4. Where did the name come from?

Our name MLS, Inc. started as standing for our family names-Mike, Lexi and Stephanie.

5. How long have you been a DBE?

Certified since September 23, 2016 to Present

6. Why did you choose the DBE program?

We wanted to be a DBE firm because of the wonderful opportunities and support system the DBE office offers. There have been situations where Primes have not paid us as they should, and the DBE office has stepped in and helped us get paid, supporting us the entire way. It was a valuable learning lesson for us, and we are grateful to have had the DBE office as a resource to help us navigate through it.

The guidance and courses offered from the DBE office are second to none! I strongly encourage anyone who qualifies to be a DBE firm to do so.

James Cooper with the SCDOT DBE office once told me “Baby don’t cry, Baby don’t eat” and it’s true. The DBE office is there to help and guide you every step of the way, but if they do not know what you need, they cannot help. Being an independent person, I’ve always tried to handle things myself- both personally and professionally. But every time situations have risen where I needed the DBE office and technical advisors, they have been there and helped resolve the situation for our company. They are a great asset.
7. How has the SCDOT helped your business grow?

Through the Business Development Center services with Financial Management Services, Marketing Assistance, Bidding & Bonding information.

M&SBA Technical Assistance has been there for me and my firm from day one coaching, assisting, advising how to expand and better understand the SCDOT Specification and Drawings.

8. What was your experience as a small DBE Prime Contractor doing a project for the SCDOT?

We focus and train every day to be the very best we can be, to grow even bigger as a company in the seeding industry. We are looking to add another trade in our approval area of work to further round out the turn-key convenience of the services we provide.

9. Is there anything else you would like to add?

This line of business can be hard to navigate. It can be disheartening and difficult, especially in the beginning. With perseverance, hard work and help from the DBE office and staff, we have been able to become what we are today.
Grant Electrical Contracting (GEC) founded its business on being an electrical contractor for major outdoor industrial and commercial projects. Their journey started in 2009 and in January 2010 they officially opened their doors for business. Their niche has become traffic signal installation and components, streetscape lighting, roadway signs and camera systems, and airport lighting. They have built expertise and have become a staple for their work ethic and professionalism that has allowed their doors to be open for 10 years to date.

President and owner, Quency Grant, Jr., has served the electrical contracting industry for just about his entire life. As a young boy he would help his father wire homes by passing wire to him and later evolved to working side by side with him on one of the largest bridges, The Ravenel Bridge, in Charleston, SC. In the fall of 2019, Quency knew it was time for him to leave SCE&G and follow his passion and calling to open his own business as an electrical contractor. This was home.

Quency had to wear all the hats when the firm first opened. He worked in the office and out in the field. As the company and its employees grew, he was able to step solely into the role as CEO. The most important responsibility of being an owner is being a leader and Quency is definitely a leader to all those who he employs. To add to the list, it is his responsibility to make sure everything flows smoothly and the company has security.

Over the years, Grant Electrical Contracting has grown from four to 11 employees. Their values and unique operation have allowed them to grow and retain most of their employees over the years. Their motto is “if you’re going to do something, do it right.” When they first step foot on a job, the employees of Grant Electri-
Professionalism

First impressions are lasting impressions. It’s disheartening with the number of firms who answer their listed business phone with “hello,” “yup” or by a young child. With the number of firms calling us daily looking for assistance in finding customers, it’s difficult to understand the first contact you have with potential customers is not with “Thank you for calling XYZ, Inc. This is George Jones, how may we help you.”

“Two things remain irretrievable: time and a first impression.”
— Cynthia Ozick.

“A good first impression can work wonders.”
— J. K. Rowling.
The Transportation Careers Training Program (TCTP) is designed to prepare unemployed, underemployed, minorities, females, and other economically disadvantaged individuals for meaningful employment opportunities in the transportation industry. This program includes Pre-Employment Training, Commercial Driver’s License (CDL) Training (Permit only), and Heavy Equipment Operator Training.

The TCTP will assist in lowering the state’s unemployment rate by increasing the number of participants that may become gainfully employed after successful completion of this program. It will also assist contractors by creating a pool of applicants from which they may recruit individuals to participate in the On-the-Job Training Program in fulfillment of the Training Special Provision Requirements.

Residents of Fairfield and Richland Counties were eligible to participate in the program. Eight (8) participants were enrolled in the training program. After successfully completing the training requirements, three (3) participants became employed in the highway construction industry.

The TCTP continues to serve as a mechanism for preparing individuals for career opportunities in the transportation industry. The 2020 TCTP is currently being implemented in Cherokee, Union and York Counties.
Manager Feature: James Cooper

James Cooper is the Chief Technical Advisor & Compliance Manager of the Minority and Small Business Affairs Division within SCDOT. His duties include supervising the Agency’s DBE Technical Advisors team, assisting with DBE project monitoring and compliance efforts, establishing DBE project goals, and providing statewide technical and construction management assistance to DBEs working on federally-funded construction projects. Cooper also conducts investigations to assure Prime Contractors are providing DBEs with a level playing field as it relates to contracts provided by SCDOT. He performs as the unit’s mediator to assist DBEs by resolving issues in the area of construction.

Prior to his managerial role, Cooper assisted certification analysts with analyzing data and preparing summary reports for recommendations for the Director’s approval. He currently serves as a liaison between SCDOT, Prime Contractors, and DBE Sub-Contractors.

Cooper has been with SCDOT for 15 years. He received a certification in Basic Studies of Civil Engineering from the Universidad Centro Americana. His professional development courses and certifications include: Supervisory Practices, Trenching and Excavation, Erosion and Sediment Control for Construction, Construction Stormwater, and Civil Court Mediator (SCBA). He is a recent graduate of the SCDOT’s Leadership Education and Development (LEAD) program.

Manager Feature: Carolyn Dee Dee Burton

Carolyn “Dee Dee” Burton has been working at SCDOT for 34 years in several departments including approximately 18 years in Public Transit, Accounting and Information Technology Systems. She currently works in the Division of Minority and Small Business Affairs (MSBA) as the DBE Program Development Manager in the DBE Reporting and Data Management Unit. She has managed DBE Certification, Title VI and Technical Assistance throughout the course of her career with MSBA. Carolyn is responsible for administering and managing federal programs for Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and State programs. She also serves as the statewide Public Transit point of contact to FTA in conjunction with the Office of Public Transit for DBE contractual reporting activities.

Carolyn holds an associate's degree in business from Midlands Technical College, Columbia, South Carolina and holds a bachelor’s degree in business administration from Southern Wesleyan University, Central, South Carolina. She has completed several leadership programs to include becoming a Certified Transit Program Administrator (CTPA) for the National Certification Council of the Community Transportation Association of America, a Certified Public Manager (CPM) through the Governor’s Exemplifying Character and Excellence through Leadership (EXCEL) for the State of South Carolina. She also completed and administered the agency’s SCDOT’s Strategic Training for Transportation Agency Representatives (STTAR) Leadership Program. Besides her professional career, Carolyn is passionate about mentoring others and has a vibrant personality.
Manager Feature: Syrees Gillens Oliver

Syrees Gillens Oliver is the DBE Certifications Program Manager. Ms. Oliver’s responsibilities include managing SCDOT’s Disadvantaged Business Enterprise and Small Business Enterprise certification programs; managing the coordination of the SC Unified Certification Program, and coordinating with SCDOT offices and Federal Highway Administration staff.

Oliver is a graduate of Webster University and holds a master’s degree in business administration. She has over 19 years of experience with SCDOT. During her tenure with the Agency, she worked as the DBE Certifications Unit Lead Analyst and has managed the Agency’s Affirmative Action Program. She is a Certified Public Manager (CPM), Recipient of AASHTO’s 2018 Civil Rights Trailblazer award, and graduate of SCDOT’s Leadership Education and Development (LEAD) program.

The Ultimate Capital Workshop

By Ashton Williams

My experience with the Ultimate Capital Workshop was nothing short of amazing. I was exposed to several of the industry’s top experts concerning financing opportunities for business owners as well as valuable accounting tips. A few key take-a-ways were:

- How to build a strong Infrastructure Foundation
- Basic Accounting Concepts
- Financial Statements & Understanding Capital
- Credit Score Stipulations & More

Business owners should make it a priority to build meaningful, relatable and transparent relationships with their Mentor, Certified Public Accountants, Lenders, Accountability Team, and Partners. The Ultimate Capital Workshop was filled with an abundance of knowledge. I look forward to attending next year’s event.
### SCDOT BDC Training Courses

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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| September 14-15, 2020 | Fundamentals of Project Management  
On-site University of SC – Columbia Campus |                                                                                  |
| September 17, 2020  | Flagger Novice  
On-site Southeastern National Safety Council  
Irmo, SC |                                                                                  |
| October 7-8, 2020   | Discover the Power of Social Media for Your Co.  
A Series for Small Business  
Virtual Training via Zoom |                                                                                  |
| October 29, 2020    | Basic Work Zone  
On-site Southeastern National Safety Council  
Irmo, SC |                                                                                  |
| November 2, 2020    | QuickBooks- Online Version  
On-site SCDOT Headquarters Building, G-22 |                                                                                  |
| November 16-17, 2020| Temporary Traffic Control- Design & Supervision  
On-site Southeastern National Safety Council  
Irmo, SC |                                                                                  |
| December 4, 2020    | Flagger Novice  
On-site Southeastern National Safety Council  
Irmo, SC |                                                                                  |
| December 9, 2020    | DBE Orientation 101  
On-site SCDOT Headquarters Building, G-10 |                                                                                  |