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BUSINESS OF DIVERSITY

BestEd builds on regional construction boom

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The Milwaukee-area construction boom is reverberating throughout a variety of small and minority-owned businesses, and BestEd Business, Mequon, is one of those feeling it.

Established in 2004 by [June Perry](#) and [Beth Bauer](#), the 51 percent minority- and 100 percent women-owned educational and office supply company has expanded to serve the construction industry, building trades and the government as a provider of safety supplies and equipment.

Its latest success: a three-year contract to provide safety supplies and



SCOTT PAULUS

June Perry (right) with Beth Bauer . . . “The certifications allow us to do business with the companies, while they benefit as well.”

equipment to the [Milwaukee Department of Public Works](#), including hard hats, vests, gloves, goggles and other protective gear.

“It was a competitive bid,” Perry said. “This is the first major contract that we’ve received for so long.”

The city was seeking a fast-delivery company, Bauer said, and BestEd Business met those specific requirements.

Perhaps its highest-profile contract is currently filling the downtown Milwaukee skyline. BestEd provides gear and equipment to workers at the [Northwestern Mutual](#) lakefront construction site where the financial services giant is building a 32-story, \$450 million office tower.

Other customers and contracts include Johnson Controls Inc., [Gilbane Building Co.](#), [Milwaukee Public Schools](#), Sojourner Family Peace Center, and the Milwaukee County Transit System.

Growth has been a goal since Perry and Bauer founded the firm more than a decade ago.

“Initially we didn’t have the internet and only served educational supplies,” Bauer said. “We had a print catalog and had to fill out the order and fax them to our suppliers.”

Now online-based, the six-employee company boasts an alphabet soup of certifications — SBE, MBE, WBE, DBE, HUB and NMSDC. The certifications aid in financially assisting small, disadvantaged and minority businesses, Perry said.

“The certifications allow us to do business with the companies, while they benefit as well,” she said.

Keeping the company online-based keeps pricing affordable, Bauer said, and gives customers the “the best possible service.” The women’s primary focus on American-made products and “concierge service” sets them apart from competitors, she said.

Both women bring distinguished business operation and community reputations to BestEd.

Perry, a native of South Carolina, learned the importance of diversity and equality early on. Her brother and a cousin participated in the 1960 Woolworth store lunch counter sit-in in Greensboro, N.C., and Perry became involved in the civil rights movement while attending the public historically black North Carolina Central University.

Perry earned her master's degree in social work from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and has accumulated more than 40 years of experience in public, private and nonprofit business arenas. She is the former president and CEO of New Concept Self Development Center Inc., Milwaukee.

Bauer earned her bachelor's degree in economics from Tulane University and an MBA from Columbia University. She founded Teacher's Pet in metro Milwaukee, one of the first retailers in the country to integrate educational materials and toys for both teachers and parents.

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