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Local entrepreneur is SBA's Va. Small Business Person of Year

By E. BRUCE DAVIS
Observer staff

Corliss Udoema of Haymarket, Contract Solutions, Inc.'s, president/CEO, received a March 9, letter from Linda McMahon, the Trump Administration's newly appointed administrator of the United States Small Business Administration, stating, "It is my pleasure to inform you that you have been selected by the U.S. Small Business Administration as our 2017 Virginia State Small Business Person of the Year."

Udoema and CSI have received many accolades since CSI's opening in North Carolina in 2006, before relocating to Manassas in 2009. This latest honor represents one of McMahon's earliest SBA actions, awarded to Udoema just 23 days after McMahon's Feb. 14th swearing in.

"It is indeed an honor to have been named the 2017 Virginia State Small Business Person of the Year by the Small Business Administration," Udoema responded. "It was humbling to read these words [by McMahon], 'your hard work, innovative ideas, and dedication to your employees and community have helped you build an outstanding business that has strengthened your state's economy."

"The SBA is pleased to celebrate your achievements and recognize your personal role in

driving our nation's economic growth."

Raised in New Bern, NC, Udoema has lived in Italy, Japan and Puerto Rico and spent time in 59 countries. Before starting CSI, she worked 33 years as a civilian contracting officer in the federal government. She characterizes her business' ascent as "From my kitchen to corporate. CSI has grown using old fashioned values and by providing excellent service."

CSI is a premier 8(a) management consulting and staffing firm that supports federal, state and local government, private for-profit and non-profit clients in the DC, MD and VA area. Never operating in the red, it uses 45 employees and five independents. CSI's growth includes recently receiving a \$40 million contract from the U.S. Department of the Treasury.

Udoema was chosen from a group of small business owners in Virginia. A Christian preacher at Mt. Olive Church in Centreville, Udoema, who believes in miracles, not coincidences, stated she first noted the March 9 letter was written exactly seven years after CSI was accepted into the SBA's Small Business Development Program.

On May 1, at the start of National Small Business Week, 54 Persons of the Year, representing each state, Washington, DC and

U.S. Territories, will be honored, at a ceremony at the U.S. Institute of Peace in the Nations' Capital.

As Virginia Person of the Year, Udoema is eligible to become the National Person of the Year by first being chosen as POY of Region Three (VA, MD, PA DC, WV and Del.). If chosen she would compete nationally with nine other regional POY winners.

Udoema means, "the one who is loved" in her late husband's Yoruba culture. Excellent benefits show her love for her employees. Comments from her associates demonstrate the love and respect Udoema enjoys.

"Working at CSI has provided me with the opportunity to learn about managing a small business from a very smart, successful entrepreneur," said LeAnn Delaney, special assistant to the president.

Andrea Crest, CSI's HR director said, "My experience at Contract Solutions, Inc. has been unique, remarkable, and life changing. At CSI I feel that I am a valued member of a close-knit team where my ideas and perspectives are valued and welcomed." She believes the rare access Udoema provides employees gives insight into the woman and business owner she is and the culture she provides at CSI.

After 30 years in the federal government, Sally Smith, former

CSI employee said, "I have never encountered a leader like Ms. Corliss, who runs an amazing organization." She said Udoema solves problems, immediately.

Doc Murdoch, VP of Government Operations stated CSI is, "An outstanding small company with ethical and fair standards, [It] encourages independent thinking with access to management for support."

Aditi Jain, HR assistant, new to CSI in August 2016, said, "Ms. Corliss runs her company with passion for her work and compassion for her employees. She creates an atmosphere of inclusiveness and makes every single employee feel appreciated and cared for."

Monica Hailey, executive assistant/office manager, loves the company's diversity. She added, "Working at CSI has been a unique experience for me. I love that it feels like we are a family. Although we function like a family, business is always first, and we aim for and consistently deliver excellence."

Through ALIA (Agape Love In Action), a related non-profit, Udoema's CSI team provides many acts of love. It supports Hope in a Bag, providing for a Woodbridge homeless shelter's residents, Wisdom Meets Technology, teaching computer literacy for seniors, Reach2Feed, supporting needy families with meals and



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Corliss Udoema

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Business Battle Buddies, helping veteran-owned small businesses learn the government contracting process.

Contract Solutions, Inc. is hosting a celebration and award luncheon for Udoema and many of her friends and associates on May 4.

Insights into Udoema's character and love of God and mankind, are evident in her recently published, *A Guiding Light' Poems and Reflections*, available through CSI and Amazon.com. CSI's website is contractsolutions-inc.com. Phone-703 686-4846.

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