

Hunting Down Success



Written by Kate Ernsting

Minority-owned Venator Staffing, LLC, does masterful job of matching candidates with firms.

The three founding partners of Venator Staffing, LLC, are not used to resting on their laurels — or apparently of resting much at all. The minority-owned firm is one of Metro Detroit's and Michigan's latest success stories.

The three-year-old Troy-based firm specializes in placing qualified professionals in accounting, finance, engineering and administrative positions at mid-sized to large companies in all industries. Its sales increased from \$600,000 dollars its first year to almost four million last year. Just notified that it is to be honored among Michigan's top 50 "companies to watch," Venator (the word is Latin for "hunter") has three specialized service lines to fill accounting and finance, engineering and administrative positions on a permanent and contract basis. The latest addition, Venator Security, offers a convenient 24- to 48-hour complete pre-employment and background checking service that is being formally launched this spring. The umbrella company, Venator Staffing, LLC, is also an esteemed member of the Michigan Minority Business Development Council.

"Venator was founded in 2002 by our three principals: myself, Karl Roehrig and Charlie James," explained Cedric Corera, the managing partner, who graduated in accounting from Michigan State University and got his master's degree from Walsh College. "We decided most of our business plan over dinner in early 2002. That vision was to create a placement service for top professionals in Michigan."

They succeeded in that first phase of their vision; Venator is now one of the top firms in the state helping companies meet their permanent staffing needs in finance, accounting, tax and treasury. But, Corera notes, Venator's newest service lines are also doing extremely well.

"Our three years have been phenomenal," agrees Charlie James, who holds his undergraduate and graduate degrees from the University of Notre Dame. "I think it's good to have three partners; it's definitely easier to make a decision than when you have two people. Being a small company, we've been able to be very agile and strategic in the way we help our clients."

James adds that the three work together well and have successfully defined their roles so that "we don't step on each other's toes." Corera handles overall management and finances and Roehrig manages recruiting. James says he specializes in marketing and budgeting, assists in research and is overseeing the launching of the newest line, Venator Security's pre-employment screening service.

NETWORKING IS KEY

"Our forte is our network," explained Roehrig, who manages the financial placement practice. "We find people who are presently working and may not be actively looking for another position. We don't go on the Internet to find candidates, we use our network to identify top talent." Roehrig, who earned his undergraduate degree in Finance from Michigan State University and his MBA from Wayne State University, says he finds about 80 percent of the company's permanent placement candidates that way; counting on his

own extensive experience and that of his highly trained recruiters to identify top candidates for each position.

"We know that we are extremely effective and efficient at recruiting. We can fill any accounting or financial job in the market place with a candidate who is extremely well qualified," Roehrig adds. Typical placements range from CFO's to Finance/Accounting Managers to Staff Accountants.

Venator's newer servicing lines—one launched in 2003 for administrative and financial staffing and another in 2004 for engineering and other technical areas—have duplicated similar success while retaining the personal touch of the financial line.

"I think the value Venator Staffing offers amounts to concentrating on the needs of the candidates, and not just our clients," says Darcy McCartan, senior staffing consultant for Venator Staffing. "It's not just about getting a job, but about getting the right job."

McCartan says she keeps in touch with her client companies and her new candidate placements on a regular basis. "We make sure we know everything there is to know about the job so we can match it with our candidates. I ask the company, 'Is there growth here? Can this evolve into a permanent job? If so, then when?'" she explains.

One of McCartan's clients, Human Resources generalist Jennifer Butler of Watson-Wyatt Worldwide, says communication works well with Venator Staffing. "Their candidates have been well equipped, both professionally and in the way they fit in once they work for our company. The Venator recruiter I work with communicates well; learning what we need and following through after placement."

Todd Larkins serves as the senior recruiter for Venator Technical, which recruits and places engineers, technicians and technical designers. He says one major difference in Venator's approach to its technical candidates—contrasted with many other staffing agencies—is that he meets with almost every candidate face-to-face. "We spend a couple of hours, talking to the candidate before we will represent them to our clients.

Larkins says one thing he will avoid at all costs is "placing someone in a job they don't like." He tries to find what the candidate is looking for in their career; now and in the next five years. Larkins also says he keeps in touch with his clients even after they are placed, "for years, as long as they are on the job.

EXPERT RECRUITERS

Both Roehrig and Corera say that the company's phenomenal success depends on hiring and training the best recruiters. These recruiters, he notes, are consultants to both the candidates and the clients.

Sometimes the attraction is moving to a better job, sometimes it's controlling one's own destiny. Sometimes people simply want to "come back home" to the Detroit area.

A chance to come back to Detroit from South Carolina was exactly what Shelly Van Arsdalen needed. She scoured the web for ideas when she came across Venator as the agent for some attractive opportunities. "My friends and family are all in Detroit, I am familiar with the area and wanted to come back."

She speaks in glowing terms of the result. "My overall experience with Venator was very

satisfying. They had prepared me very well for the various interviews I had had and always showed a lot of interest in placing me where I would be well suited." She said that Venator always seemed to have her best interest in mind.

Now Van Arsdalen, a Financial Reporting Specialist for Daimler Chrysler, has worked for a year with the Germany-based company's external reporting group preparing SEC filings and assisting with Sarbanes Oxley compliance issues.

Maryann Daddow, who used Venator to recruit Van Arsdalen, says she now uses the company "pretty much exclusively as my source for permanent placement in the accounting area." Daddow, until recently the Director of Accounting for DaimlerChrysler, likes the way Venator tries to find "the right match" between company and client.

"They always do a very good job in interpreting our needs and finding candidates who not only meet our technical requirements but who also fit in well with our culture." Daddow now directs DaimlerChrysler's component financial control.

LOCAL AREA INVESTMENT

"We know what our candidates need to do to manage their careers. And we show our clients how to attract and keep top talent," Roehrig says.

As a result, Venator is a service to the local economy. "Not only do we put people to work, but we also make companies in the area stronger by placing local talent within their organizations.

Corera says that almost 50 percent of Venator's placements are filled by female or minority candidates, an extremely high percentage.

Additionally, the three partners invest in the local area by pouring the lion's share of their annual profits back into their business. Much of this goes to their employees or contract workers, James explains. "We offer our contract workers benefits after three months and our clients love this." Although this means sacrificing some profitability, gains in employee retention make this worth it.

"Our annual employee turnover rate is less than five percent," adds James. "Our profit margin is still healthy.

A RELATIONSHIP-BASED BUSINESS

James notes that the low turnover rate is essential in the staffing industry where relationships are key and turnover "is a killer."

"It's a relationship-based business. You want to talk to the same client over time and develop trust with that client." He says Venator's "huge advantage" is that the three partners are in it for the long term. "We've committed ourselves to the 15-year plan."

As Corera explains, "Most candidates are qualified on paper...We look at how they get along with others, their ability to get things done, how goal-oriented they are, how they are driving their careers and how they lead."

Corera says the company is proud that it stands behind every candidate and is rewarded by referrals and retention. "Our clients, the companies who benefit from our ability to help them find these very talented individuals, give us enthusiastic feedback," he says.