

TOP STORY



## Owner of up-start tech firm A3L Federal Works partners for success

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Roya Maher, right, president and CEO of A3L Federal Works LLC, talks with business and financial manager Hollie Reeves. Staff file photo



FAIRMONT — You could say Roya Maher has an entrepreneurial spirit running through her veins.

“It’s in my DNA,” Maher said while sitting inside a conference room on the second floor of the Alan Mollohan Innovation Center. “My whole family, they are all business owners.”

Maher is the president, CEO and founder of four-year-old A3L Federal Works LLC, a technology, engineering, management and technical training services firm in Fairmont on the verge of major growth.

But for the enthusiastic Maher, her road to success in government contracting began back in 2012, two years before A3L first opened.

“My kids were old enough for me to get back to work,” she explained. “My first job was at Galaxy Global, and I was a quality control engineer for the NASA IV&V here in Fairmont.”

Right around the same time, Galaxy Global was acquired by Pleasant Valley’s TMC Technologies as a wholly owned subsidiary. Maher thought perhaps it was time to take a break, or at least that’s what she planned to do.



“No,” Maher quickly added, “Immediately I got a call from a friend who works for Northrup Grumman right here at the I-79 Technology Park. They wanted me to come in and be a technical trainer.”

After two short years, mainly through direct experience and a little bit of her own personal ambition, Maher felt the time was right to go it alone and start her own government contracting business.

“Immediately I had my first sub-contract with Northrup Grumman,” Maher said referring to work she was already doing at the time.

After getting certified as a Woman-Owned Business by the federal government, Maher and the company she named after her four children; Arya, Ariana, Arman, and the lone “L”, Laily — A3L Federal Works for short — focused on the long and challenging process of being accepted into the U.S. Small Business Administration’s 8(a) Business Development Program. That’s when Maher met Melissa Loder, the Senior Area Business Opportunity Specialist for the West Virginia District Office of the Small Business Administration.

“I first met Roya (Maher) when she was taking a federal acquisition management class,” Loder said of the class she co-taught. “Roya was delightful as a participating in that class because she wanted to learn everything she possibly could.”

Along with A3L, Loder works with 12 other 8(a) Business Development Program small businesses in the state. She said the program is essential for helping socially and economically disadvantaged entrepreneurs gain access to the economic mainstream of American society.

“A lot West Virginians could qualify for this,” Loder said about the 8(a) program,” Loder said of the program Maher’s company has been part of since 2016. “She (Maher) started working on her application and it is a lengthy process because the Small Business Administration does a thorough vetting.”

At this point, according to Loder, both the Small Business Administration and the 8(a) certified company get “married.”

“Because we’re going to be together for a nine year business development program,” she said.

Along the way, A3L continued its slow growth leading up to September when the company won its first prime contracts, that is, federal government work Maher and her team have full responsibility for.

“My first prime contract was awarded from the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services and is called “Report to Congress,” Maher said of the five-year, multi-million dollar data analytic and report writing job for the federal agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that administers the Medicare program and works in partnership with state governments to administer Medicaid, the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP), and health insurance portability standards. “It was so exciting.”

As fate would have it, also in September, A3L was also awarded another five-year, multi-million-dollar prime contract with the Department of Defense Forensics and Biometrics Agency performing knowledge management or in simple terms, the process of creating, sharing, using and managing the knowledge and information of an organization.



“It was wonderful, and I have amazing, highly qualified employees working for me,” Maher said. “Officially I have 10 employees but I’m getting more.”

One of those employees Maher spoke so highly about is Hollie Reeves who worked as a consultant during the summer day and night on the extremely detailed cost proposals for both the Department of Defense and Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services contracts.

“They were back to back, so it was busy,” Reeves said adding that she was brought on full-time by the end of August as the company’s business and financial manager.

Maher said she knew Reeves for several years going back to when she worked at Northrup Grumman. Moving from a large business that is generating revenue from multiple areas to a relatively unknown start-up like A3L, for some, is a big risk. Reeves, on the other hand, couldn’t disagree more.

“I did expect us to grow,” Reeves said referring to the two prime contracts A3L won in September. “We are an 8(a) and we knew we had the competitive advantage and we knew we had the capabilities. I fully believe that we’re going to be able to grow and great things will come next year and years to come.”

But in government contracting winning can be a blessing and a curse. The real trick is being able to perform the tasks required within budget while at the same, keeping the government customer happy.

“That’s why I chose to team with the incumbent contractor (Healthcare Management Solutions, LLC in Fairmont) on the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services project we won and team with another company, NextGen Federal Systems from Morgantown which has a lot of experience working with the Department of Defense,” Maher said. “They tell you, you need to be a generous 8(a).”

Along with the two prime contracts, A3L is also a sub-contractor for Leidos on the \$110 million National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Cyber Security Center and Department of Commerce Enterprise Security Operations Center project happening in Fairmont, as well as work on the Afghanistan Automated Biometric Identification System and Iraq Automated Biometric Identification System program.

“It was just awarded about a month ago,” Maher said. “And the work is going to be performed here (Fairmont).”

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