

Tribal Member Business Spotlight: American Grounding Systems, operated by Helen and Greg Higgins

American Grounding Systems was incorporated in 2000 and specializes in manufacturing electrical grounding straps and wires for customers all over the world.

The company was founded by Helen and Greg Higgins and has grown from two employees to as many as 16 during its existence, doubling its revenues every year until the recent recession.

As with many business ventures, the initial idea to go into business was born out of the owners' expertise with the industry they were working in. It started small and grew over time.

"We started out with a couch, a coffee table and \$50 hand tool," said Greg Higgins. "We went from there and expanded over time and eventually moved into our current facility, which is located in Toledo."

The owners also realized that to be successful, they would have to work hard.

"We knew that we would have to put in a lot of effort to succeed and for the first three years we put in 16-hour days,

seven days a week to make our dream a reality," said Helen Higgins. "It was really difficult at times, but we knew that this was what we wanted to do and we followed through on our goal to have our own business."

The husband and wife team has made the business a family and Tribal affair, employing their own family members and several Tribal members as well.

"It was important for us to have our children involved and also to employ as many members of the Tribe that we could. This way, we felt we were supporting the individuals who were part of our lives and identity," said the matriarch of the business, Helen Higgins.

The list of customers who have purchased and currently use the grounding straps is impressive. It includes Boeing, NASA, Airbus, the International Space Station, Disneyland, Raytheon and the U.S. Army, Navy and Air Force.

"Our product is pretty unique," said Greg Higgins, "Only eight other compa-

nies in the world produce what we do and we are the only business that does solely grounding straps. At this point, we are so well known that we do not have to do any advertising. All of our orders come from word of mouth."

Their success speaks for itself, but this dynamic couple also had plenty of advice for individuals who are looking to start a business.

"First off, be prepared to work hard. Owning your own business is not easy. Second, take baby steps and do something every day in the direction that you wish to go and before long you will see that you have accomplished some great things," said Helen Higgins.

As if on cue, Greg Higgins took over from here and added, "You should keep a journal of what you hope for and then check the boxes once you complete them; this way you stay focused. Also, treat your employees with respect and make them part of the team. This is very important in making the company a success."

The couple, which has received four loans under the STBC loan program, is grateful for the support they have received from the Tribe over the years.

"Without the capital from the loan program, we never would have been able to purchase the supplies we needed for some of the orders we had," said Helen Higgins. "In addition to this, at one point we asked and received a loan in a matter of days, which enabled us to meet the demands of a particular customer. That is incredible support."

The couple, contemplating retirement in the near future, had one last piece of advice – "Any Tribal member who wishes to start their own business should use the resources available to them and follow their dreams. Hard work and dedication are the necessary elements to be successful in business."

For more information on American Grounding Systems, please visit its website at www.ags.bz or e-mail Helenh@ags.bz or Greg@ags.bz.

STBC Thanks Tribal Members for Participating in Small Business Survey

The team at STBC would like to thank all of the Tribal members who completed the Small Business Development Needs Assessment that was included in the May issue of *Siletz News*.

STBC has received 65 responses from 11 different states. The survey will help develop a baseline for the actual needs of Tribal members who are engaged, or what

to be engaged, in business.

"This is exactly what we hoped for," said Stephen Larrabee, STBC development manager. "We will be able to use the survey results to create and enhance other parts of our development program. The information will be used to develop and conduct training sessions for Tribal members, to help identify experts who could be valu-

able resources, to identify grant programs and opportunities for both Tribal members and STBC, and to use as the starting point for our business forums that bring Tribal members together. We have also been able to increase our e-mail distribution list from 29 to 67 individuals."

STBC plans to conduct its first business forum at the end of the summer and

will keep in touch with Tribal members through the e-mail distribution list and other means of communication.

The STBC team still encourages Tribal members to complete the survey. Any questions should be directed to Larrabee at slarrabee@stbcorp.net and/or Michael Phillips at mphilips@stbcorp.net.

Child Safety Seats

While riding in a car, seatbelts must be worn and young children must be in car seats at all times, even on tribal lands. There is little enforcement of these safety laws on tribal lands and there are few places on tribal lands to obtain car seats, therefore seat belt and car seat use is low among American Indians.

MOTOR VEHICLE ACCIDENTS ARE THE LEADING CAUSE OF UNINTENTIONAL DEATHS FOR NATIVE AMERICANS AGES 1-44...¹

... which means that motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of injury and death for American Indian children!

Using seatbelts and car seats properly can save the lives of Native American youth!

Safety seats ensure that you child is secure during a car crash. People are 25 times more likely to die if they are thrown from a car – safety seats help youth stay put!²

What can we do to protect children against injury and death from motor vehicle accidents?

- 3 out of every 4 people have their child safety seats installed incorrectly³, have a certified child passenger safety technician or local law enforcement check your car seat.
- Ensure that children are secured in a car seat that is appropriate for their age, weight, height and any special needs they may have.
- Ensure that children under 4 feet and 9 inches tall sit on a booster so that their seat belt is in a position to protect them. – Seat belts are designed for adults who are at least 4 feet and 9 inches tall.
- Encourage your community to adopt a primary child safety seat and seatbelt law. – Enforcement is an effective way to encourage safety in cars.
- Almost 80% of deaths from car crashes happen within 25 miles of the home – buckle up even for short rides!²
- Never install a rear-facing infant seat in front of an airbag!

**PROTECT OUR PEOPLE
USE CHILD SAFETY SEATS**

¹ CDC Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS). <http://www.cdc.gov/npc/wisqars/>. Aggregated 1999 – 2005 data. Accessed online 4/12/2008.

² Oklahoma State University EHS Safety Training. Seatbelts: Why you should use them. <http://www.pp.okstate.edu/ehs/kopykit/SEATBELT.HTM>. Accessed online 4/14/2008.

³ SafeKids Worldwide: first and only national organization dedicated solely to the prevention of unintentional childhood injury, the number one killer of children ages 14 and under. www.safekids.org. Accessed online 6/9/2008.

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Smoking While Pregnant Opens Door to Dangers for You and Baby

Not only is smoking harmful to you, it's also harmful to your baby during pregnancy.

When you smoke during pregnancy, your baby is exposed to dangerous chemicals like nicotine, carbon monoxide and tar. These chemicals can lessen the amount of oxygen your baby receives. Oxygen is very important for helping your baby grow healthy. Smoking also can damage your baby's lungs.

Women who smoke during pregnancy are more likely to have:

- An ectopic pregnancy (fertilized egg implants outside of the uterus, usually in fallopian tube, and begins to grow)
- Vaginal bleeding
- Placental abruption (placenta peels away, partially or almost completely, from the uterine wall before delivery)
- Placenta previa (a low-lying placenta that covers part or all of the opening of the uterus)
- A stillbirth

Babies born to women who smoke during pregnancy are more likely to be born:

- With birth defects, such as cleft lip or palate
- Prematurely

- At low birth weight
- Underweight for the number of weeks of pregnancy
- Babies whose mothers smoke before and after pregnancy are four times more likely to die from cot death (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome).

Babies born prematurely and at low birth weight are at risk of other serious health problems, including lifelong disabilities (such as cerebral palsy, mental retardation and learning problems) and in some cases, death.

www.marchofdimes.com/pnhec/159_155.asp?gclid=CLDU2JHQ_6ECFSkYagod1BznDg
www.champixinfo.co.uk/smoking-and-health.shtml

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