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## **Worcester minority business owner misses top prize City nominee a national finalist**

### **SMALL BUSINESS**

**By Scott Flaherty SPECIAL TO THE TELEGRAM & GAZETTE**

**WASHINGTON** — When she started with Fisher Contracting Corp. 14 years ago, Charran K. Fisher didn't know much about the demolition business.

Since then, she's learned to read blueprints, make estimates, hired more employees, won state and federal contracts, and most recently received a nomination for a national award.

Ms. Fisher, 36, of Worcester, was one of 10 finalists for this year's National Minority Small Business Person of the Year Award, given by the U.S. Small Business Administration.

When the winner was announced last night in Washington, D.C., it was not Ms. Fisher, but Oscar Quiles, president of Pentaq Manufacturing Corporation in Puerto Rico.

However, just to make it to the finals, Ms. Fisher had already come a long way -- having been named SBA Minority Small Business Person of the Year for both Massachusetts and New England.

"It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, really," Ms. Fisher said earlier this week. "It's such an honor; the other companies, some of them are much larger than ours, so it's overwhelming."

She has been president of Fisher Contracting since 1998. Her company provides a range of demolition and construction cleanup services and started in 1988, according to its website. It's based in Worcester and works locally, across New England and, at times, outside the region.

Ms. Fisher graduated from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst in 1997 and said she started working at a nonprofit organization in Worcester. She met Edward G. Fisher, now her husband and senior vice president of the company, shortly after college and took an interest in

demolition work he was doing alongside his father. “For that year, I kind of shadowed him as much as I could and learned about the business.”

Once she had learned the ropes, she left her other job, became president of Fisher Contracting, and hit the ground running. In 1998, her first full year, the company began going after state contracts.

Since then, the company has grown from two employees to nine full-time office staff, and has between eight and 15 employees in the field, depending on the project.

A turning point, Ms. Fisher said, was her decision to have the company certified through the SBA's 8(a) Business Development Program, something she always knew about but worried would be too much paperwork.

Fisher Contracting enrolled in the program, which provides training and support to help small and disadvantaged businesses, about four and a half years ago, she said. It has allowed the company to serve as a general contractor on federal projects, which now make up a large portion of its business.

For example, the company completed two projects over the past three years at the U.S. Navy shipyard in Portsmouth, N.H., and recently received a special contract offering up to \$4 million worth of federal work over the next year and a half.

Ms. Fisher said all the help she has received through the SBA has helped the company weather the economic recession.

“I almost feel guilty saying it, but we've actually grown over the last few years,” Ms. Fisher said.

Fisher Contracting is exactly the type of business the SBA program aims to help, said U.S. Rep. James P. McGovern, D-Worcester.

“It shouldn't just be the big guys getting federal contracts,” he said. “Oftentimes, smaller companies are the most qualified.”

The company's growth and job creation made Ms. Fisher stand out to the awards committees in Massachusetts and New England, said Robert H. Nelson, director of the SBA's Massachusetts District Office.

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