

# MONEY

CS\*T

## DOING BUSINESS

# ENGLEWOOD ENTREPRENEUR READY FOR A 'BIG YEAR'

As she watches how the Trump administration's actions might affect her business, Adrian Mobley is rapidly expanding Air and Wellness Safety Training through construction projects

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Adrian Mobley is expecting a big year for her company Air and Wellness Safety Training, which originally started out offering CPR and safety training for workplaces.

Mobley worked as a respiratory therapist in Chicago hospitals for 25 years and leveraged her experience to launch Air and Wellness in 2014. But the business has grown rapidly the last five years by expanding into the construction industry.

In 2020, it received a \$4.5 million subcontract to manage traffic and safety at the Chicago Transit Authority's subway projects, including the first phase of the \$2.1 billion Red and Purple Modernization project.

Mobley is optimistic about the future of various CTA projects, especially since the budgets have already been committed.

Air and Wellness has benefited from the CTA's goal of awarding 20% of its Red and Purple Modernization contracts to Disadvantaged Business Enterprises. Mobley's company is one of 119 minority- or woman-owned businesses working on the project, according to the agency.

DBEs are for-profit small businesses in which socially and economically disadvantaged people

own at least a 51% interest and control management and daily operations. The annual gross income of a DBE must be less than \$23.98 million, and an owner's net worth cannot exceed \$1.32 million.

Also in 2020, Air and Wellness started installing fencing and supplying caulking for construction projects in Chicago. Last year, the company expanded into flooring and carpentry.

In January, it won a \$500,000 carpentry subcontract for office construction of the CTA's Red Line Extension.

The company has bids for more projects in 2025. It's bidding on subcontracts to do flooring at O'Hare Airport, and carpentry, fencing and traffic control for the Illinois Quantum and Microelectronics Park. Mobley expects to hear about the bid results as early as next month.

Mobley is not expecting big changes for her business under a new presidential administration. In terms of state and local policies, she said "nothing major stands out" besides the normal challenges of running a business.

She expects 2025 to be a year for more growth. "I'm ready to see something more. I'm ready for that big jump," she said.

The company earned \$3 million to \$4 million in revenue last year,



Adrian Mobley, owner  
of Air and Wellness  
Safety Training.

PAT NABONG/SUN-TIMES

### AIR AND WELLNESS SAFETY TRAINING

**About:** Provides CPR and safety training for workplaces, as well as traffic management at construction sites.

**Neighborhood:** Englewood

**Owner:** Adrian Mobley

**Founded:** 2014

**Staff size:** 35

**Estimated annual revenue:** \$3 million to \$4 million

**Biggest potential risk:** Finding specialized office workers

**Biggest potential opportunity:** New construction-related projects

### ABOUT THIS SERIES

A new presidential administration aims to shake up the way businesses are regulated through its economic policies on everything from tariffs to taxes. Against that backdrop, the Sun-Times reached out to 10 Chicago-area entrepreneurs about their plans for the future.

Each week, we'll introduce one of them. We'll circle back at the end of 2025 to share how government policies — at the federal, state or city level — helped spur growth and innovation or led to cost-cutting measures that slowed hiring or raised consumer prices.

compared to \$1.5 million in 2020.

She hopes to reach \$8 million in sales for 2025. She also wants to double the amount of full-time employees to at least 70.

Mobley grew the company from three employees in 2020 to about 35 last year, which includes her two adult daughters. One is a foreman, and the other is an operations manager.

She also wants to expand her

business beyond being a subcontractor. The company got a contractor license and is waiting for the city of Chicago to approve it as a minority-certified general contractor.

In February, Mobley expects her company to start installing appliances at high-rises and condos in the Chicago area for appliance and electronics retailer Abt's Builders Division.

"We are working diligently to obtain more work," she said.

Costs that soared in recent years have stabilized. For example, during the pandemic the price of one fence panel jumped from \$90 to \$120. Now, prices are between \$90 and \$100. Supply chain delays — common during the pandemic — have also eased.

Mobley has no problem hiring for union jobs such as masons, carpenters, laborers and ironworkers, which pay as much as \$50 an hour with benefits. Workers hail from all over Chicago, but especially the South and West sides.

"The majority say they are so appreciative," she said. "They would not be in this position if I had not hired them."

However, it's difficult to hire in-house staff such as accountants, project managers and salespeople. She said hiring and retaining "estimators," who bid for contracts, is her biggest challenge. "It's crucial to have them or else we can't do the projects," Mobley said. Her company used to have two estimators but is now down to one.

In-house staff can easily jump to other companies if an employer offers higher pay or perks from remote work to a company car.

"They've got the upper hand," Mobley said. Training in-house staff and then losing them is a financial burden. "It's terrible for us," she said.

Although Mobley works "excessively hard" as a business owner, she said creating jobs and having an economic impact in underserved communities is very gratifying. She has a health care background, yet has unexpectedly become a leader in the male-dominated construction industry — and feels she is an inspiration to women and other entrepreneurs.

"We provide more career opportunities to help improve quality of life for people," Mobley said.