

Stimulus funds for Luke bolster small businesses

by *Erin Zlomek* - Sept. 18, 2009 01:50 PM, *The Arizona Republic*

Stimulus-funded improvements are under way at Luke [Air Force Base](#), and Arizona small businesses received the bulk of contracted work.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 designated \$15.3 million for [infrastructure improvements](#) at the Glendale military operation. Most of the work involves repatching cracked runways and making electrical systems more energy-efficient.

When choosing companies to complete the repairs, members of the base's contracting unit kept in line with a Department of Defense goal to "maximize [small business](#) participation," according to the agency's Recovery Act plan.

"The focus was on awarding local contractors as much as possible," said Lt. Col. John Thomas, the base's chief civil engineer.

Luke awarded around \$12 million worth of contracts to four Phoenix-area firms that are classified by the federal [Small Business Administration](#) as disadvantaged or minority-, woman- or disabled person-owned small businesses.

Base staff had \$15.3 million to spend on 28 projects but chose low contract bids and came in more than \$2 million under budget.

Thomas said the savings likely mean that the base will be awarded an additional \$1.7 million by November to complete three more projects. He added that [small businesses](#) would likely be given preference for those additional contracts.

Despite Luke's effort, August data released by the SBA shows the federal government fell short of its goal to award 23 percent of its contracts to small businesses in fiscal 2008. Federal agencies came in at 21.5 percent instead.

The four small businesses that won the bulk of Luke's Recovery Act contracts are:

- **Name:** MRM Construction Services Inc.
- **Background:** Established in 2002 and based in [Phoenix](#). Is classified by the SBA as a Hispanic- and woman-owned small business. The owner is Marie Torres.
- **Value of contracts awarded:** \$6.9 million
- **Work to be done:** Will repave roads and runways.
- **Name:** Sunset Air Inc.
- **Background:** Established in 1989 and is based in Phoenix. Is classified by the SBA as a Hispanic- and woman-owned small business. Martha Smith is the president.
- **Value of contracts awarded:** \$3.2 million.
- **Work to be done:** Will install new air conditioning systems that would make the base more energy-efficient.
- **Name:** Utility Construction Co. Inc.
- **Background:** Established in 1992 and is based in Mesa. Is classified by the SBA as a disadvantaged- and woman-owned small business. Suzette Nickum is the president.
- **Value of contracts awarded:** \$1.5 million.
- **Work to be done:** Will replace lighting around the airfields and repair water systems.
- **Name:** Affiliated Western Inc.
- **Background:** Established in 1986 with offices in Chandler and Nevada. Is classified by the SBA as a Native American and disabled veteran-owned small business. Howard Joe Lawler is the president.
- **Value of contracts awarded:** \$1.2 million.
- **Work to be done:** Will repair power and communications equipment.