



Best in the Business



Financial Growth in Tough Times

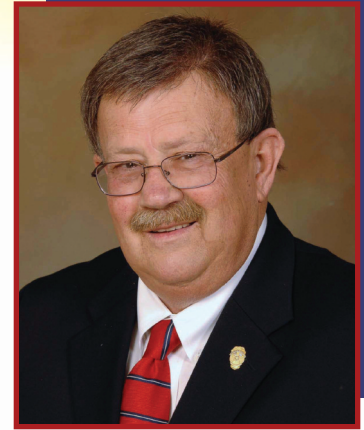
By Cody McBeth

Faced with the economic crisis of the century, many turned to the federal government for help. J.D. Colbert, administrator of Oklahoma Correctional Industries (OCI) at the Oklahoma Department of Corrections (DOC), turned to his innovative ideas to bring aid to the department. The ideas brought capitol growth like never before.

After retiring from Southwestern Bell Corp., Colbert applied for his current position at OCI after seeing the position in an advertisement. With a great deal of experience gained in marketing and sales during his time in his prior job, Colbert made a great fit for the administrator position. Starting work at OCI in 1999, Colbert began to quickly modernize the way production was sold. In 2004, OCI opened its first showroom to showcase to the product lines. The showroom gave customers a chance to actually see the products first hand, test them, and ask the in store staff questions regarding the products for sale, whereas before they could only view the products in a catalogue. The showroom concept proved to be very effective for OCI as overall sales and customer satisfaction soared. As sales grew, Colbert grew his OCI operation as well to meet the needs of his customers. Colbert incorporated new product lines into manufacturing operations such as home/office furniture, chemical products and refurbishing. Colbert has also modernized the way in which automobile license plates are manufactured at OCI, using new digital technology, which is now being used statewide.

As the nation's economy began to plunge a few years ago, Colbert quickly realized the downward spiral wouldn't be coming to an end anytime soon. With this in mind, he started researching ways to diversify revenue gains at OCI. After brainstorming, Colbert and his team decided attracting private sector partnerships would be a great way to gain revenue. Today, private partnerships bring in nearly half of OCI's overall total revenue. Colbert said, "Private partners are not only a good source of revenue, but also a win-win-win opportunity for the private sector partners and OCI. We in the correctional industries are able to accomplish their goals and fulfill their needs in all three areas while generating meaningful work for offenders and additional revenues for industry operation."

Expanding Private Industry Enhancement Programs (PIE) proved to be a great success for OCI and the Oklahoma DOC. The number of offenders working with PIE has dramatically increased from the original 30, to more than 450 in 2010, and by the end of this year these programs are expected to employ more than 750 offenders. As PIE expands its employee base, the number of offenders employed upon release expands as well. Offenders have been placed in a variety of jobs, including state government. "The threat of the poor economy provided us the opportunity to change the way we do business, resulting in a focus on partnerships and an improved organization," Colbert said.



J.D. Colbert

"Through Colbert's efforts, revenue from OCI programs has increased from break-even points, to levels that allow for capital improvement, which enhances the efficiencies of the products being sold" said Edward Evans, associate director of the Oklahoma DOC Field Operations Division. With the revenue gained from OCI, the agency was able to offset two furlough days for more than 4,000 employees at a cost of more than \$600,000 per day. Colbert's unprecedented, innovative skills through even the roughest of economic times proves a change for the better can occur, no matter the circumstance. Colbert has transformed OCI into one of the leading correctional industry operations in the nation. "Preparing offenders for success on the outside is a critical component of our business," Colbert said. "Reducing idleness on the facility yards as well as providing products unmatched in quality, price and warranty are important because they support reduction in offender idleness, improve recidivism rates and provide excellent long-term investment of the customer's dollars."

Cody McBeth is ACA's professional development specialist.