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### *Morgantown Entrepreneur Named 2010 W.Va. Small Business Person of the Year*

**CLARKSBURG, W.Va.** – In the late 1980's, Craig Hartzell had a desire to create a company that could successfully compete for- and win- Department of Defense contracts. The U.S. Army Special Forces veteran was aware there were business opportunities with the military and that no West Virginia companies were doing so at the time. He also knew it would take an extraordinary effort because West Virginia's economy was considered resource-based and not technology-based.

But through his persistence and leadership abilities, Azimuth, Incorporated was created which resulted in Hartzell, the company's president and CEO, being named West Virginia's 2010 **Small Business Person of the Year** by the U.S. Small Business Administration.

Hartzell will be honored at the annual West Virginia Small Business Awards luncheon on Thursday, May 13, 2010 at the Tamarack Conference Center in Beckley. He will also be recognized at the 47<sup>th</sup> annual National Small Business Week gala in Washington DC on Tuesday, May 25, 2010, where Hartzell will learn whether his name will be called as the National Small Business Person of the Year.

Azimuth specializes in engineering, fabrication and engineering services in support of the U.S. Department of Defense. Hartzell as the founder and first full time employee of Azimuth has over thirty years of experience in the fields of electronic communications, special operations and business management.

Hartzell realized in order to be successful, he had to create a company that could win contracts, provide outstanding support and build a solid reputation. He wanted a company that incorporated sound ethical principles, customer loyalty, and the highest standard of integrity and honesty. Although Azimuth is known by these principles today, they didn't evolve without overcoming several obstacles.

Hartzell found he was competing for contracts with larger, well-established companies and coming up short. He realized what he needed was more experience and some clout. To overcome this disadvantage he entered into a Department of Defense Mentor/Protégé Program with Electronic Warfare Associates, (EWA) Inc., a large prime contractor for the DoD, serving as Azimuth's corporate mentor. This association led to Azimuth's first contract of \$79,000 which allowed Hartzell to hire his first employees. It also provided Hartzell with some of the tools and experience he needed to build a solid performance core.

With a Mentor/Protégé agreement in place, Azimuth seemed to be on the right path to win government contracts. However, Hartzell soon realized the company lacked the necessary capital to meet the financial challenges of successful contract bidding.

A loan through SBA's 7(a) guaranty loan program was secured through a local lender that helped alleviate some of the initial funding issues. More frequent contract awards led to the need of another SBA-guaranteed loan. Hartzell credits the receipt of those two loans as being absolutely critical to the initial survival of Azimuth.

Through all of these efforts, Azimuth has evolved into a reputable defense contractor of nearly 100 employees operating in four facilities in West Virginia – two in Morgantown and two in Fairmont – and in satellite locations in Maryland, Virginia, Florida and North Carolina.

West Virginia SBA Director Judy McCauley said Hartzell epitomizes the criteria for the Small Business Person award and is an excellent representative for small business success in West Virginia.

Hartzell was nominated by Sharon Stratton, center manager for the West Virginia Small Business Development Center in Morgantown.

Also being honored at the **2010 West Virginia Small Business Awards Celebration** on May 13<sup>th</sup> event are: Jalon "Jay" Petre, president of Renick Millworks, LLC, Renick as **SBA Young Entrepreneur**; C. Thomas and Rosemary Grant from First Choice Bookkeeping, Inc. in Huntington as **Financial Services Champions**; Diane Lewis, president of Action Facilities Management in Morgantown as **Minority Small Business Champion**; Kara Gray, owner of New Horizon Consulting in Dallas as **Women in Business Champion**; Scott M. Hedges, president & CEO and Michael J. Grady, vice president from Power Sonix, Inc. in Martinsburg as **Small Business Exporters**; and David M. Hughes, John M. Hughes and Fletcher G. Herold, Jr. from L.J. Hughes & Sons, Inc. in Summersville as **\*Jeffrey Butland Family-Owned Small Business**. (\*L.J. Hughes & Sons, Inc. also received this award for SBA Region III which includes Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia, and the District of Columbia.)

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