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Fairfax, VA Based Firm Turns 'Vision into Action'

WASHINGTON -"Ashley Chen is to ActioNet, what adrenaline is to entrepreneurial spirit," states Joseph Loddo, district director of SBA's Washington Metropolitan Area District Office. "The American small business community is a source of innovation and job creation, and it represents the economic future of our country. Ms. Chen has demonstrated that vision and action working together simultaneously are the ingredients that turn dreams into reality, and innovation into jobs."

ActionNet is a SEI CMM Level 3 Certified IT Services firm that specializes in Enterprise Software Development involving a Full Lifecycle Methodology, Information Security, Systems Integration, and Training. The company was founded with one employee, Ashley Chen, and plans are underway to employ a staff of 100 and generate revenue of \$7 million by the end of 2004.

After growing up in a traditional Chinese family as the youngest of seven children, Ms. Chen came to the United States to study at Binghamton University. Armed only with motivation and her family's belief in education, Ms. Chen earned both her Bachelors of Science and Masters of Science degrees in five years and with honors. After graduation, she decided to stay in the United States and took a position with a consulting company which involved assignments on Capitol Hill. In addition to maintaining an exhausting work schedule, she was able to achieve the highest level of professional certifications from both Novell and Microsoft.

In 1998 Ms. Chen began to feel somewhat incomplete. Similar to many successful entrepreneurs, she enjoyed her job and was highly successful, yet she yearned to do something different. Inspired by an enlightening piece written by a traditional Japanese philosopher that stated, "...action without vision is a nightmare, vision without action is only a daydream," she decided to begin her entrepreneurial adventure by starting ActioNet. Ms. Chen states that she, "founded the company with the dream to build something great."

The Fairfax, Virginia based company received certification in SBA's 8(a) Business Development Program in March 2004.

SBA's 8(a) Program offers a broad spectrum of assistance to foster the competitive growth and development of firms owned by socially and economically disadvantaged individuals. The 8(a) program prepares small companies to compete in the Federal contracting arena. Also, the 8(a) program enables firms (through various forms of management and business development, financial and government contracting assistance) to take advantage of subcontracting opportunities available with large firms (as the result of fostering public-private partnerships) and

thus, become viable concerns in the economic mainstream. In addition, SBA's 8(a) program includes a Mentor-Protege program to assist 8(a) participants to penetrate the Federal arena and "learn the ropes" from experienced businesses.

An outstanding leader and manager, Ms. Chen credits ActioNet's success to the quality of her staff. She states, "I am very lucky to have employed a staff that shares my dreams and goals for ActioNet. Together we work hard to meet and exceed our customers' expectations. Without them none of this would have been possible."

Ms. Chen's management approach is to measure her success by ensuring that clients' needs are exceeded and employees grow and learn. As owner of the company, she wants clients and employees to understand their happiness is important to her personally as well as to the survival of the business. She is most proud of the fact that the company's first customers remain customers today and that many of her new customers are a result of favorable word of mouth.

ActioNet has successfully implemented a business growth strategy. The company reinvests its profits back into the firm and its people to fuel future growth and expansion. Ms. Chen believes that a direct correlation exists between attracting and retaining the best talent and ActioNet's attitudes towards its employees. As a result, an internal mentor/protégé program has been established along with brown bag lunches between senior management and staff. The lunches afford staff the opportunity to hear directly from senior management on the direction and priorities of the company. The lunches also afford senior management an opportunity to hear directly from ActioNet's staff on the work environment and where opportunities remain for the company to improve and grow. The company also provides each employee with minimum \$2,000 in their training account to use for their professional training and development

The satisfaction of both her clients and employees has led to annual growth of 100% since its incorporation in 1998 and the company receiving numerous awards including the 2004 "Award of Excellence" from the Society for Technical Communication, and 2004 "Virginia's Fantastic 50." In 2004, Ms. Chen was named the "Asian Entrepreneur of the Year" by *Asian Enterprise Magazine*. The company has also received recognition as the U. S. Department of Transportation's outstanding "Women-Owned Business Enterprise Award", the U.S. Department of Energy's "CIO IT Quality Award for Technical Excellence" and the Highest "Exceeds Customer Expectations" Past Performance Rating from Dun and Bradstreet.

Ms. Chen states "each of us has potential; our individual challenge is to identify and maximize the potential within." It is clear that ActioNet has identified and maximized its potential.



For more information on ActioNet, contact Ashley Chen by phone at (703) 204-0090 x108, by email at achen@actionet.com, or you can view the web site at <http://www.actionet.com>.