





# PLANNING AHEAD AND *PAYING IT* FORWARD



*There are few end-to-end IT providers in the State of Florida, particularly those able to handle projects of the utmost security...*

**Written by Samita Sarkar**

When Lieutenant Colonel Gabriel Ruiz retired from the U.S. Army in 2006, he set out to give back to the warfighter by establishing a one-person company based on the values he learned during his 26 years of service. By 2010, he incorporated Advanced IT Concepts Inc. (AITC) with his wife Sandra, expanded, and began to hire additional staff. Three years later in 2013, AITC employed 13 people. Today, AITC employs about 60 people across four facilities, including its headquarters in Winter Springs, Florida and its warehouse facility in Longwood.

President Ruiz founded the company based on ethics, loyalty, partnership, and cooperation, the traits he learned in the Army. Accordingly, the company is doing very well. By January 2019, AITC will more than double its headcount to fulfill a large Department of Defense contract, and he is actively looking for an additional facility for expansion.

AITC has contracts across the globe in Germany, Korea, Kuwait, and throughout the U.S., and is able to go above and beyond to handle a variety of high-tech and high-security tasks, including cyber security, complex engineering, integration implementation and updating of IT systems, warehousing, logistics support, and shipping and receiving of sensitive material.

For instance, recently, AITC won a four-year, classified IT services contract with a South Carolina client. The company was granted the contract on a Friday, and on Monday the team was informed that they were welcome to start in 10 days. Ruiz told the client that the team was already on their way, and would start tomorrow. The next day, AITC began servicing the client's systems.

"I had sent people up to Maryland even before we got the contract," recalls Ruiz. "We showed up with tools, trailers and people who were ready. We were able to start that Tuesday, three days after we got the contract; it's unheard of. We also hired local people. We exceeded expectations from Day 1. That is typically what we strive to do."

The customer, who was actually a colonel himself, was blown away by AITC's abilities to think one step ahead.

"He asked, 'how can you have people to satisfy today when you just got the contract on Friday?' That's what coordination and planning ahead provides you. That's our commitment to customer satisfaction. We didn't even know we were going to get the contract," says Ruiz.

In order to maintain this level of excellence, and due to the sensitivity of the customers it supports, Ruiz notes that the fast-growing, veteran-owned company is selective about those it brings onto the team.

"What we look for in addition to technical expertise, is people who can be trusted. They need to be dedicated, ethical employees, and need to be hungry for knowledge because the technologies that we support change constantly. We have to stay on top of technology. There has to be that hunger for knowledge and customer service. That is our culture. It extends from me to the last employee," says Ruiz.

That being said, the company is already seeking new hires. It has recently received a \$60 million-dollar contract with Lockheed Martin (NYSE:LMT), a 10-year ASRC (Arctic Slope Regional Corporation) Federal Holding Company contract in support of NASA to perform high performance computing support, and has coordinated a comprehensive project agreement with the German target manufacturer Theissen Training Systems. ▶







**Gabriel Ruiz, LTC, USA (Ret.)**  
President/CEO of Advanced IT Concepts

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► Moreover, AITC was ranked 4<sup>th</sup> this year on the Fast 50 list of Central Florida’s fastest growing companies by the **Orlando Business Journal**, noted for its almost 300 percent growth over the last three years. It was also listed on the Florida Fast 100 list this 2018 (as well as several previous years) by **Florida Business Journal**.

AITC’s future plans are to grow the business, not only in size – its four facilities are currently at full capacity – but in capability as well. “We are looking at doing more, adding additional locations and expanding at other locations so we can support customers and additional vertical markets,” says Ruiz.

For example, this summer AITC won a multi-year contract with the Greater Orlando Aviation Authority (GOAA), to provide services that include program and project management; information technology research, analysis and product evaluation; data analysis and strategic planning; infrastructure support; systems engineering support; applications design, development, installation, configuration and testing; database management and administration; cyber and physical security; network operations and management; and IT consulting.

“This is a new space for us. We have never done work with airports,” Ruiz tells us. But now that AITC has won this contract, it will be looking further into the aviation industry, and is already seeking out additional opportunities.

“As we grew from one person, to three, to 60, and now to 130, of course we are adding more capacity, capabilities, locations and the like, and we will continue to do what has worked for us throughout our lifecycle,” Ruiz comments.

Ruiz is checking into commercial real estate and considering the next type of facility he would like to add to the company. “We purchased a lot next to our work system warehouse. We are working on the engineering plans and permits to build another 10,000 square-foot facility there, but we are also looking at potentially purchasing a 30- to 50,000 square-foot facility given some of these logistic contracts that we could potentially win, which will be multimillion-dollar and multi-year contracts.”

Business moves quickly at a company like AITC, which has achieved an almost vertical growth rate since its incorporation. One of its customers, a modern assimilation company that has simulator actuators for helicopters, sought out AITC to provide warehousing space. AITC has worked with this customer to not just provide them the space so they can avoid the time and inconvenience of flying people out from other countries, but has also provided them with the expertise to handle parts, assembly, quality assurance testing and even implementation. This is another area in which AITC is considering for expansion, which would lead to the potential purchase of an integration facility of up to 50,000 square feet to handle the assembly work.

But AITC has additional goals beyond simply growth. The company has launched a non-profit organization to support Puerto Rican entrepreneurs affected by Hurricane Maria, and a social campaign dedicated to tackling veteran homelessness. Mr. Ruiz, who is himself a veteran and Puerto Rican businessman, has also supported many other important causes and organizations through his company, including the Muscular Dystrophy Association, Wounded Warriors, Nemours Children’s Hospital and United Cerebral Palsy of Central Florida.

“We started looking at how we could help when the hurricane hit Puerto Rico last year. We sent some supplies, like many other people did, but I wanted to do more and there has been a phenomenal influx of Puerto Rican entrepreneurs given the situation. A lot of them are moving to Central Florida and they do not even know where to start. That is what inspired me and my team to put this organization together. We are collaborating with other agencies and organizations here, and we are hoping to help many, many entrepreneurs,” emphasizes Ruiz.

Meanwhile, AITC’s campaign on veteran homelessness will be ready to launch in a matter of months, and Ruiz says that it will be followed by subsequent campaigns on an ongoing basis.

“We are putting together committees to raise the funds and find candidates, but like a good military officer, I am always planning ahead. Every six months or so, we will start a new campaign while the other continues running,” he explains.

None of this success would be possible without the support of others. At AITC, its most valuable asset is its personnel, and Mr. Ruiz also credits a large part of his company’s success to organizations like the Florida Small Business Development Center (SBDC) at the University of Central Florida, which encourages entrepreneurship as part of an agreement with the U.S. Small Business Administration. Ruiz says that there are two major things that he has learned from his 12 years of entrepreneurship: the importance of paying it forward, and encouraging small business owners.

“For companies to be successful, they need to pay it forward. There is always somebody behind you, newer than you, junior to you, whatever the case may be – you can extend a hand, and I encourage anybody reading this to always look across and below, and help others because that is how we get here,” he shares.

The reason that stoking the entrepreneurial spirit is so important to Ruiz is because he realizes the challenges of starting a business, which can sometimes seem insurmountable. Despite those challenges, small business owners play a vital role in the economy.

“Growing a business is difficult... At times it seems impossible. However, perseverance, dedication and the ability to offer a great solution will most likely result in success. So, for those junior entrepreneurs that are reading about AITC – we started from the ground up. Somebody with a dream after 26 years in the Army, having no idea what I was doing and where I was heading, and now we know. I encourage young entrepreneurs to leverage the resources of organizations like Small Business Development Centers, all these agencies out there that are available for phenomenal growth, and potential resources that in most cases are free. These folks have been instrumental to our growth and they have not cost us a penny,” he concludes.

AITC will continue to plan ahead while it expands its services and facilities, all the while paying it forward to support the success of others and the community as a whole. ■

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