

# San Antonio Express-News

## Small S.A. Firm Wins Fight to Keep Fed Contract

David Hendricks March 2, 2010

A small San Antonio company made the U.S. government blink last week.

Rohmann Services Inc. is a government contractor running about a dozen jobs for the U.S. government around the country.

Edwards AFB in California said in January it wanted to terminate its most recent contract with Rohmann early and to do Rohmann's audiovisual services itself. The move followed a directive from U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates that more contracts should be "insourced," or brought in house.

Rohmann sued, stating that the U.S. Air Force used inaccurate cost estimates to justify the move. The Air Force's cost analysis left out several positions and failed to include the government's overhead, benefits and overtime costs, Rohmann said in its lawsuit.

As an injunction hearing in federal district court in San Antonio approached last week, the Air Force relented, stating Rohmann could finish out its latest contract, which started in October 2009 and expires in August. Victorious, Rohmann ended the lawsuit.

Rohmann, founded in 1982 in San Antonio, has provided the audiovisual services at Edwards AFB in a series of contracts since Jan. 1, 1998, President Ron Boone said.

Boone declined to say how many employees carry out the service at Edwards AFB, but he did say the contract provided about 15 percent of his company's revenues.

Edwards AFB said it will put the service back up for bid before Rohmann's contract expires in August. Boone said Rohmann will bid to keep the work, as it has done many times in the past.

Rohmann's victory may seem small, and it may only be temporary. But it is significant.

Small businesses rarely have the wherewithal or the courage to question a government contracting decision.

Rohmann won this case, handled by San Antonio lawyer David Barton of the Gardner Law Firm, because Edwards AFB clearly was not following a logical process on what to insource and how to justify it.

It's unclear whether the Defense Department even has a detailed process. No one has seen it. Gates' directive last year ordered military brass to insource more contracts but to do a cost-benefit analysis each time. If the military cannot save money, it should continue to rely on contractors.

Contractors have consistently proved they are more efficient than government workers, even in cases where contractors perform top-secret functions. Sure, cases of abuse and fraud have occurred, but those are caught and stopped. Abuse and fraud happens with government workers, too.

Barton said he hopes the Rohmann case will make the Defense Department reconsider its approach to insourcing and will end up doing less of it.

Contractors may not pay the best wages, but they do save money for taxpayers and are innovative. Small businesses have to find new cost-cutting measures in their bids to win competitive contracts. The government rarely has been known for cost-saving innovations.

The Defense Department still can turn around and insource Rohmann's contract at Edwards AFB. It can continue to bring more functions in house around the country.

But the Rohmann case proves that the government has to be truthful in its cost comparisons before it does so.

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