

The energizer interviews



LOUIS E. JAMES
OWNER
SEEL
DETROIT, MICH.

As a young man, SEEL CEO Louis E. James worked doggedly to help support a large family. As an adult, he served low-income communities by providing shopping alternatives, built businesses that employed thousands and taught entire communities to conserve energy and save money. This U.S. Army veteran's passion for serving his country and his community drives his success.

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Business-building veteran

This Vietnam veteran is a creator of business opportunities and a pioneer of urban energy efficiency.



Passion drives people to achieve great things. From an early age, Detroit businessman Louis E. James has been determined to make his mark on the world while leaving it better than he found it.

One of nine industrious siblings, James helped support his family by providing a variety of services to neighbors in his native Starkville, Mississippi. Working with four brothers and four sisters, he mowed nearly every lawn in the neighborhood, painted houses, washed floors, delivered groceries and more. In college, he managed both the bookstore and student union. Upon graduation, he enlisted in the U.S. Army, where he specialized in personnel administration during a tour of duty in Vietnam.





Back in the USA

Upon returning to the United States, James relocated to Chicago and in a partnership with friends opened a successful chain of mini marts on the city's urban south side. From his professional start in Chicago to today, James' commitment to diverse neighborhoods has been evidenced by his contributions to the communities in which he lives.

James does Motown

In the late 1990s, James took his entrepreneurial skills to Detroit, where he formed MCL JASCO, a company that was founded to manage supply chains and logistics for the auto industry. Today, that enterprise has expanded into a number of areas, including government contracting services and energy efficiency.

The energy efficiency division of MCL JASCO is called Solutions for Energy Efficient Logistics, or SEEL. Founded in 2009, SEEL specializes in implementing residential and commercial energy efficiency programs, customer engagement and technology solutions. As a result of its work and community involvement, SEEL has won more than 20 prestigious awards, including recognition as the Michigan Minority Supplier Development Council's 2018 Supplier of the Year.

Creating opportunities

"My job is getting people to work," James said. He is proud to have made payroll on time for 30 years. When launching a program in a new market,

SEEL makes it a priority to seek out and hire local individuals who are familiar with the community or already engaged with area residents.

Depending on the complexity of the program, employee training for a new SEEL program takes as much as four weeks. James believes that team spirit and a common goal are essential to creating a good business environment. The emphasis on training is critical because SEEL employees work directly with customers through local events as well as providing energy efficiency consultations in homes and businesses. Gaining trust is important.

Reaching out to the community

Since 2009, when the company first partnered with DTE, SEEL has served more than a half million households and 11,000 small businesses throughout the United States, targeting hard-to-reach communities and engaging with them to provide energy efficiency assistance and solutions. Traditional methods of mass communication are often ineffective in reaching residents of some urban communities, so SEEL has developed a very successful custom approach.

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In 2019, SEEL is celebrating its 10th anniversary as one of the largest minority-owned, disabled-veteran-owned energy program management firms in the nation.

Passion drives people to achieve great things.



SEEL partners with community groups to educate businesses, homeowners, landlords and tenants about energy efficiency. Depending on the nature of the program, these groups may include faith-based groups, chambers of commerce, nonprofits, community action groups and local retailers. SEEL connects directly with customers through community events where they educate customers about energy-saving opportunities.

This also provides an opportunity to schedule in-home energy consultation appointments so customers have confidence in the energy expert who will be visiting their home. This face-to-face, grassroots approach provides support for both the local energy company and the consumer and is unique in the industry.

DTE and its customers appreciate the work that SEEL and Louis E. James have done for achieving energy savings and carbon footprint reduction. We also want to thank James for his service to our country. With Veterans Day being on Monday, November 11, let's extend thanks to all who have served. 🇺🇸

DTE encourages veterans to apply for a wide variety of positions at the company by visiting dteenergy.com/jobs. The website provides Military Occupational Codes and translates the codes to open positions at DTE.



As a Michigan company, SEEL is a great fit for DTE, which has long focused on working with local firms in order to further Michigan's economic progress. Read more about our commitment to Michigan Businesses on page 7.

DTE



Our salute to veterans

In 2016, DTE was recognized as a gold-level Veteran-Friendly Employer by the Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency. A Gold-level distinction means a company retains more than 75% of veteran hires within a 12-month period and implements internal veteran support networks.



Louis E. James' tips for creating a successful and sustainable business:

- Educate yourself on the energy industry, its programs, services and customers.
- Get out of the office and talk to people.
- Thoroughly explain job requirements to potential hires; talk and listen to employees. Communication and training are key.
- Match employees to jobs based on their skills.
- Provide employees with ongoing training.
- Provide benefits, such as good health insurance, for employees.
- Be patient. Success takes time and deliberate measures to grow.



Above right: Jeily Francis, in the SEEL Contact Center, helps a DTE business customer schedule an energy consultation. Bottom, from left: William Barksdale Jr., Prasanthi Raju, Louis E. James and Ashley Lucier discuss new SEEL energy efficiency initiatives.



“Give employees enough time to learn, be trained, and understand their job.”

– LOUIS E. JAMES
SEEL, LLC

“There are 50 things that I would have done differently. But I take everything as a stepping stone and don't look back. Everything in life is a learning experience, and you move on.”

– LOUIS E. JAMES, SEEL, LLC