

From [Lake County News-Sun](#)

A Lake Bluff business owner's new partnership with a surgical practice in Africa is the result of a push by the national Black Chamber of Commerce to increase exports of goods and services to the continent.

Ronnell Showell, a veteran surgical assistant who founded On-Call Surgical Services LLC in 2003, was selected by the Illinois Department of Commerce to showcase his business during a December trade visit to the Republic of Cameroon. During the 10-day trip, Showell marketed his services and supplies, including alternative energy products, to CEOs from three dozen companies.

Showell, a Navy veteran, diversified his product line for the market in west Central Africa, adding solar panels and water purification systems. He returned from the visit with a \$50,000 contract from orthopedic surgeon Dr. Jean Minyem, who ordered certified, pre-owned equipment and supplies to revamp his surgical suite. Showell said the surgeon's medical center was filled with '70s-era equipment from China.

"African companies are seeking to do business with the U.S.," Showell said. "They're looking for quality products."

Showell and Minyem have formed a partnership — OCSS Ltd.

"There's an emerging market in Africa and I want to be a bridge for other small businesses in the community, show them that it's a new day dawning," said Showell.

On-Call Surgical employs 21 people, including seven who now work for the company in Cameroon. The company expects revenues, including new sales in Africa, of \$2 million in 2012.

Rev. Arthur Gass, president of the Black Chamber of Commerce of Lake County, suggested Showell for the trip.

“I knew part of his growth strategy was to expand into international exports,” said Gass, who noted that representatives of the national Black Chamber of Commerce have traveled on trade missions to other African countries, including Ghana and Nigeria, resulting in multimillion dollar contracts for companies in the U.S.

“We’re trying to make people see there’s enormous opportunities in Africa,” Gass said.

The chamber’s push to get black-owned companies to export to countries in Africa could also give a boost to the African-American labor pool in the U.S., which has a higher-than-average unemployment rate.

“We’re trying to attract more companies like On-Call Surgical,” Gass said. “Exporting to Africa can provide jobs for people in this country.”

Showell, who serves as president of the Illinois Surgical Assistants Association, will return to Cameroon in April to oversee the revamping of his new partner’s facility and also to set-up a medical mission trip for which he has already enlisted the volunteer services of orthopedic surgeon Dr. Stanford Tack of the Illinois Bone and Joint Institute.

“We’re looking for sponsors for donations of used medical equipment and devices,” Showell said.