

## Unishippers in Green Bay helps businesses deliver

Company provides logistics for shipping services

The Green Bay Press-Gazette talks weekly with area business owners in its Saturday conversation feature.

This week, Wanda Sieber, owner of Unishippers, talks about how she and husband Bill decided to acquire a Unishippers franchise, providing logistics services for small and medium-sized businesses.

Q. What is your business (service or products offered)?

A. We service accounts that ship small package or pallet freight using ground, express, international, truck-freight and ocean-freight services. Our carrier partners include UPS, YRC, N&M Transport and 70 additional LTL and FTL carriers.



Bill and Wanda Sieber are franchise owners of Unishippers. Their business organizes shipping services for small and medium-sized businesses.

We also diversified our business, beginning in 2009, by offering outsourced administrative services to other Unishippers offices. They retain their local sales staff, but their customer calls, invoicing and freight processing is all done from our Green Bay office. For some franchises, we have contracted to hire and house their sales staff as well.

We see this as a growth market. Of the 286 Unishippers franchises in the U.S., 106 outsource their (administrative services).

Q. Do you have a specialty?

A. Our sales effort is focused on the small- and mid-sized business sector. We service large accounts like Marshfield Clinic and Unilever, but these large accounts come to us directly as referrals to help these businesses meet their specific shipping needs.

We find that with downsizing, few companies have the luxury of staffing dedicated shipping personnel. We help the average employee negotiate the perils of the shipping world.

By leveraging the combined shipping volume of all its customers, Unishippers gets deeply discounted rates from its carriers, resulting in lower shipping costs.

Q. What made you choose this type of business?

A. We find that the business is very dynamic, and both Bill and I thrive on change and are good at adapting in a changing business marketplace. We have also found that we enjoy being part of the franchise body. Some of our best friends are franchise owners in states all across the continent.

Bill sits on the Technical Advisory Board for the corporate office, and this is a good fit for him as he is a gearhead and has enjoyed working with computers ever since leaving his job at Camera Corner/Connecting Point. I am the only woman currently sitting on the President's Advisory Council, a group of nine successful franchise owners who meet monthly to counsel with Unishippers CEO Dan Lockwood.

Q. Where do you see your business in three years?

A. Our recent purchase of three business condo units at 1238 and 1240 Main St. on Green Bay's east side assures us of the space we need for the next three years. We especially love our location since we still have children at East High School. We also like being on the bus line as it affords work opportunity to employees who do not have cars.

Looking ahead: Aside from organic growth, which is the easiest thing to project, we have no way of knowing what the business will look like in three years because opportunity for growth is all around us. We are certain to pick up additional clients on our admin services side. We had to stop accepting new franchises because we ran out of space last year.

We also project there will be additional owner turnover within the Unishippers franchise system. Some of the original owners are hitting retirement age. If areas are offered for sale and are attractive to us, we would consider adding new franchise locations, most probably with an onsite partner to facilitate belly-to-belly sales.

Q. How many employees do you have?

A. We currently have 18 on the payroll.

Q. Do you expect to hire in the next three years?

A. We have existing desk space for nine additional employees. We rent our first floor to the GB Symphony and The Stanley Art Gallery.

If we need additional space for employees, we can move into our first floor area after a few years.

Because we took advantage of the city's Community Development Revolving Loan Fund, we are obligated to hire 1.5 full-time equivalent jobs in the next 18 months; we have met that requirement.

HR is a huge part of what we do now, and we are maniacal about hiring and retaining individuals who fit our "work hard – be happy" company culture. We steal a lot of our workplace policies from Google and other forward-thinking businesses. Our goal is to hire really smart people who love coming to work at Unishippers.

Q. Where did you get your initial financing?

A. We used a combination of home equity, family funds and bank financing. We initially purchased with a business partner, and bought out his share after 18 months. We are currently applying for the Signage Grant Program offered for Olde Main Street businesses.

Q. Who is your target audience?

A. Businesses. We do not do any walk up/counter personal shipping like The UPS Store. Companies with 50 or fewer employees make up 80 percent of our business. Our typical freight customers have revenue of under \$50 million. Our Express (UPS shipping) customers have revenues of up to \$500 million. Of course, there are some exceptions. We also ship for a number of school districts, including the Green Bay School District.

Q. When did you start the business?

A. We purchased the Green Bay franchise in 1992. Initially, Bill did sales and I did the invoicing, but we have reversed our roles now and I head up sales and HR while he oversees Ops and IT.

We first ran the business from our home, later moved it to 200 S. Monroe (we were in the lower level of the Zeimer building), then at 1244 Main St., and now our current location. Interestingly, 1244 Main St. was the former Truttman Hardware store, run first by my grandpa, Wally Truttman, then by my uncle, Royal Truttman. Until the mid '60s, the Truttman family lived in the apartment above the store. This was the space we leased for Unishippers for the last three years. I loved being there.

Q. What advice do you have for new businesses getting started?

A. Triple your working (start-up) capital. We did detailed business plans and worked very hard as any new business owner would expect to do, but both owners had to take second jobs until the business — and cash flow — stabilized. That was unexpected and was a difficult time for us. Of course it gives us great stories to tell now.