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Competing with the Big Boys



GREAT LAKES COLD STORAGE



GREAT LAKES COLD LOGISTICS, INC.



Competing with the Big Boys

Competing with the big boys of the cold storage industry is nothing new for the once Midwest-focused Great Lakes Cold Storage and Great Lakes Cold Logistics, a pair of sister companies.

By taking smart risks to build an asset based operation and streamlining an efficient consolidation program the Great Lakes Companies have put themselves in a position to truly listen and respond to customer needs. Doing so has allowed Great Lakes to develop a unique niche and level the playing field that has traditionally been dominated by long-established companies that have millions in assets under their management.

While focused on providing nationwide LTL and TL to all retail food service and specialty grocer operations, its recent partnership with Wal-Mart as an approved consolidation program has helped solidify its place at the table as legitimate players among frozen foods storage and trucking giants, referred to as "the big boys." And in competing with these top nationally regarded distributors, the Great Lakes Companies refuse to abandon the values that have helped them rise to the top. In being innovative with decisions, they have carved out a place for themselves by capitalizing on bold corporate moves while keeping their operations customer focused.

Asset Based Operation

Originally founded by Patrick Gorbett, a veteran in the food distribution industry as a cold storage operator, an opportunity presented itself to further add value to customers who were already paying freight costs for their products to and from the Great Lakes Cold Storage facility.

The opportunity? To add an LTL logistics operation that could service customers from a cold storage and a trucking standpoint that would be completely owned, operated and maintained by the same general management team. In an industry where the big boys traditionally shy away from this asset based approach CEO

Gorbett saw the chance to find a place at the table. In partnership with Great Lakes Cold Logistics President Daniel Palus and Executive Vice President Howard Schillinger the risk associated with building an asset based logistics company was eventually outweighed by the added value the team saw in assuring quality and control for the customer. In order to compete with the big boys, becoming asset based was a move that would pay dividends for Great Lakes and for its customers.

"We took a look at our operations, asked ourselves how we could become the best in the industry, and the answer became clear," said Gorbett. "Where many competitors coordinate with other companies for their logistics operations, our asset based approach puts our management team in charge of the storage and logistics for our customers."

Competing with Effective Consolidation

Great Lakes' approach to LTL consolidation has also allowed them to compete with the big boys. The flexibility and control by which Great Lakes brings together various customers' LTL orders consolidates them and ships them out under one roof provides a higher level of service to customers in a number of ways.

First, efficiency in tracking orders for customers has been unified by dealing with one company who ships, stores, consolidates and ships again. Second, through the asset based approach all costs are more closely controlled compared to the bigger companies that mostly broker their freight costs with outside trucking companies.

These two benefits have kept customers coming back to Great Lakes time and time again. Not to mention the fact that the Great Lakes center of operations is located in Solon, Ohio—just outside of Cleveland—and provides a centralized operation where a large percentage of the nation's population is within a 500-mile reach of their facility.

Orders that require a week to fulfill for some warehousing and logistics operations are shipped in a day with Great Lakes Companies to New England, to the South or just about anywhere in the Midwest.

Competing by Caring For the Customer

Though a good deal of its success can be attributed to being asset based, Great Lakes' intense focus on the customers' needs has been the primary factor for steady growth and solid reputation. With a total operation of fewer than 200 employees, Great Lakes finds added success in creating personal and trustworthy relationships with its customers.

"Our approach to the business gives the customers better control over their products as they are being shipped and stored," says Schillinger. "We've truly placed an emphasis on quality enhancements and customizing operations for the individual customer as best as possible."

Great Lakes further cares for its customers by committing to cutting edge technological advancements and incorporating them into its day-to-day operations. Where most of the big boys cannot manage in transit temperatures, Great Lakes has adopted the technology which allows it to completely monitor and manage temperature throughout the supply chain. This benefit has been met with great satisfaction from the customer.

In all, the cold storage industry has long been dominated by warehousing corporations with hundreds of facilities and millions of dollars in assets. Great Lakes Cold Storage has chipped away at that advantage by blazing a trail of its own through calculated internal decisions about corporate operations and keeping the serviceability of the customer first in mind. The asset based approach, along with continued efficiencies in the consolidation program has left customers quite satisfied, and in doing so, has elevated the Great Lakes Companies and positioned them to compete with the big boys.