



“We saw the opportunity and moved into it - literally!”

Rob and Val Valois, owners of the “Northumberland County Moving Company” saw an opportunity and moved on it with a move into moving. As experienced trucking people, with a lifetime of moving experience they jumped into the void they saw, with both feet. Setting up shop with one local truck and a home office, and a five year vision they were determined to see the project through. It wasn't as though they didn't know what they were up against they just didn't know what the potential was. “The area (Northumberland County) was underserved and had great potential. “And we still say that we are the only people doing what we do” they both say some five years after deciding to start a completely new local business.

Rob Valois, the son of a mover, has to date 37 years of moving experience and long distance trucking. Moving to Cobourg twelve years ago the family business was moving bottled water for CJC bottling. Calling the Company CRAVIN, each letter represented one of the names of family members, he set the tone for the family business - and it would remind Rob of his family life while being on the road. As a long distance trucker he was contracted to North American Vanlines, a major North American moving company. He absorbed both the good and bad practises of the larger companies and when it came time to do something else as his contracts moving bottled water were flushed by a reorganisation of CJC he and Val were ready. Val had ten years of administration experience in the moving industry so when the need to move in a new direction came they were both ready.

Armed with many years of experience and the insurance of three trucks moving freight around North America they moved into moving. With nothing but hope and a vision, they even didn't have a formal business plan, but plenty of spreadsheets, they knew there was an opportunity. The local competition was not expanding to fill the market expansion created by the move of "new settlers" into the area. These people were cash flush, wanting to leave the City and needed to be moved. The Northumberland County Moving Company was ready. They had four goals: to set realistic goals, to build a name that one day would be sellable, to be the mover of choice in Northumberland and to stamp name recognition in the minds of the locals. To that end the truck was painted bright red and the name emblazoned in the largest letters possible. "In the early days" Rob told Business Times, "We would park the truck, when it wasn't being used in visible spots all over Town. It worked we would get calls from people saying, 'I've just seen your truck and I need a move'" Soon the one truck became three and the long distance trucking fleet, dedicated to freight, was converted to cross country loads. This division was reorganised into "Centennial Moving Systems" using owner-operated tractors and Northumberland County Moving Company trailers and all trucking outside Canada ceased. "We dropped it and never looked back, besides using company drivers and our own tractors just took up too much company time and money on maintenance of the vehicles ." said Rob.

Of course lucky breaks came from time to time. Early in the Company's history a family acquaintance in Newfoundland passed away and the opportunity to buy his equipment of moving vehicles and inventory came up, they seized upon it and the Company became much bigger at a smaller cost. Onward and upward! "The moving business has changed in the last few years and



Hard at work in the cold

we took advantage of it. The internet now drives much business and we know how to use it. For example last year when the major van lines were positioning their fleets in Ontario we suspected that the business and economic downturn would force people to move from the West to the East Coast. We were right, we positioned our trucks in the West and moved East - we had the best year

of business last year!” Rob explained.

Speaking in their local office, which is attached to the warehouse, in the Diamond Head Mall on Wilmott St. In Cobourg the Valois team explain the next stages of their plan. First step is to consolidate the gains made during the start-up phase and to brand the business as the mover of choice in the Northumberland area. That means that they have to continue to nurture and mentor the employees. Six regulars in the warehouse and four in the office, with the workforce expanding to ten on the road in the summer. Employee development is big in this company. “It’s very hard to find drivers with people skills, and we now have people wanting to work for us, we don’t have to advertise. There are lots of opportunities in moving, two of our people who started as helpers now run trucks for us as owner-operators.” said Rob when explaining his way of using employees as team members, “We all have to work together for all of us to prosper”

As a new business the Northumberland County Moving Company has been amazed at the support given by other business to their efforts to grow. For example a couple of years ago when the County employed an out of Town mover to shift their belongings two hundred yards the Northumberland County Moving Company publically asked why local bids were not sought for the job, to their surprise other businesses supported the query, “It was nice to be helped in that way.” Ironically when the coordinator of that job moved out of Town they moved her! As a new business the Northumberland County Moving Company places a lot of emphasis on getting involve in local community activities. Moving the new homeowners into Habitat for Humanity homes is a regular pro bono job: sponsoring sports teams, working the Waterfront festival and the Relay for Life as well as delivering Girl Guide cookies has been some of the charity work performed over the years. Members of the Better Business Bureau, with an A1 rating they take their public image very seriously.

Realising that good customer relations is essential, the Northumberland County Moving Company makes a big deal of emphasising that a good move is a partnership between the mover and the to-be-moved. The Company is a proponent of customer education and devotes a page on its

website to the topic. "Moving companies have a bad rep," quoting the example of the usual very small backstreet moving company - 'Three men and a truck style' "You have to be protected. People have unrealistic expectations of a moving company - moving takes time and preparation." Telling the stories of the time he did a move and had to pack unwashed dishes into a box, arriving at a house and nothing was boxed, arriving at the new house and the homeowner had not marked the contents of the box on the outside and having to open each box and directing it to the designated room thereby slowing everything down. "Customers can help cut costs by being prepared." Rob explains. Customers can also buy insurance before the move to protect their belongings from unanticipated problems. Accidents do happen and the Northumberland County Moving Company has a very liberal repair policy. "We live here and work here, we fix all problems and we get upset when problems occur." Rob told us as he explained how impressed he is with the more casual attitude to problems in this area, when compared to working in Toronto. "In Toronto we tend to have to fix every little scratch and dent, here the attitude appears to be 'It's only scratch don't worry about it'"

As to the next five year's Business Times was told it's hard to make realistic plans as the moving industry is reactive. "The moving industry is a direct reflection of national business - a snapshot indicator." However the intent is to switch from being a startup company to an established competitor with a track record and to steadily replace the fleet of trucks. As most startup businesses fail within the first five years it is an easy predication that with the enthusiasm of the owners, backed up by supportive and motivated employees this company has passed that point. How far will they go? No one knows yet but as they say "We're on the move!"

1423 words

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