

Familial route

The Noyes family business has been on the move for 86 years

BY MINDY FAVREAU

PHOTO/MINDY FAVREAU

Earle W. Noyes and Sons began in 1923 with founder Earle Sr., who bought a secondhand REO Speedwagon for \$125 to haul train passengers' trunks from Portland's Union Station for 75 cents a trunk. Now, 86 years later, the moving and storage company uses a fleet of over 80 United Van Lines trucks to move households and businesses across the country, bringing in between \$8 million and \$10 million in revenues a year.

But deep down, the company hasn't strayed from its roots. It's still in Portland, the last 30-plus years bordering Franklin Arterial, and still run by a member of the Noyes family. Earle Sr.'s grandson, Peter, has been president since 1987, and he's grooming his son, Will, to continue in his footsteps.

The fourth-generation family company was recently awarded a 2009 Maine family business award by the Institute for Family-Owned Businesses. The company, one of three lauded, was chosen out of 63 applicants and nine finalists. "I thought the competition was pretty stiff, so I was pleasantly surprised," Peter Noyes says of the win.

But not too surprised, considering the company's commitment not only to family (Noyes' father, Lester, remains chairman, and Noyes' wife, Lynn, works as a customer service manager) but "extended family" — what Noyes calls the company's roughly 70 employees. Many of the operators and packers average over 20 years there, ensuring a level of quality that keeps Earle W. Noyes and Sons competitive, Noyes says. Better yet, the company has never laid anyone off, a trend Noyes hopes to continue. "In this economy, it becomes more of a challenge," he says.

While the stagnant housing market has meant fewer moving jobs, the company's managed to secure a fairly steady stream of office and industrial business to keep busy during the winter, the typical slow period. In the last few weeks, though, the home-moving business has picked up. "People had been holding off, but there are some signs the economy is improving, so people



Peter Noyes, president of Earle W. Noyes and Sons, is celebrating recent recognition of his fourth-generation, family-owned business

are putting homes back on the market and making plans to push forward," Noyes says. Still, the company plans to hire only 10 additional summer employees this year, a drop from the 15-20 it usually brings on.

Though the company's mainstay is household relocations, with office and industrial moving "a close second," storage has become a growing part of the company's business since it turned the former Atlantic & Pacific warehouse on nearby Kennebec Street into one of the state's first heated self-storage facilities in 1990. The 200,000-square-foot facility holds about 550 storage rooms, and Noyes plans to add more this winter. The company's main facility has grown to accommodate more storage as well, with an expansion in 2001 that doubled the size of the building to 100,000 square feet.

Originally a pre-med student, Noyes

changed his major to business halfway through his college career and joined the company full time as operations manager when he graduated in 1977. He's witnessed the company's changes, both big and small. "I remember when we got our first fax machine," he says. "We used to have an answering service because there was no such thing as voice-mail. Now, all our long-distance trucks have satellite tracking and we communicate with drivers using smart phones."

Some things, though, are still the same. Today, Noyes sits in the same office he used to share with his father, only now, he shares it with his son, the company's operations manager. Asked about the challenges of working with family, Noyes struggles to come up with any. "There are so many plusses compared with disadvantages," he says. ■

©Mainebiz 2009