



Member Spotlight: Northland Cold Storage, Inc.

Family focuses on global perishable distribution

By Nancy Jean

David Pokel says the work they do at Northland Cold Storage, Inc., shipping millions of pounds of perishable fruits, vegetables, cheeses and meats, is much more complicated than it would seem to people driving by their facility at 2490 S. Broadway in Ashwaubenon.

With the third generation of the Pokel family now owning the business, Northland Cold Storage is more than 500,000 square feet of primarily refrigerated and frozen warehousing in Green Bay and Schofield, Wis., with an affiliated operation in central Nebraska.

Amazon.com brags it can ship in one day, said general manager Pokel. "We do that every day," he said. In fact, he said they can do better than that: shipping times are sometimes so critical they boil down to just a few hours after an order comes from a production floor.

Pokel's wife Kathy Pokel is president of Northland Cold Storage and is majority owner. She spearheaded a renovation of the refrigeration system in the Green Bay warehouse during 2007.

Technology advances have helped create a more efficient operation, said Pokel, but it's "the right people" with organizational expertise who make the business hum. With 32 of the business' 36 employees working out of the Green Bay operation, "There are days there when people would think it's absolute chaos and it's not," he said.

Though most of their customer base is within 100 miles of Green Bay, the company is global, shipping to the lower 48 states and a dozen foreign countries. Logistics are handled through the company's Northland Freight Services, which itself owns no trucks, thereby eliminating expenses. An upgraded Web site gives customers real-time access to orders.

Leadership Green Bay welcomes applications for '08-'09 class

Open the door to leadership learning and opportunities — apply to be among the 40 elite individuals that will comprise the 2008-2009 Leadership Green Bay class!

LGB is a community leadership program that educates participants about the community and helps to mold them into contributing leaders. The benefits are many — individuals hone their leadership skills, the community at large benefits from leaders who want to share their newfound knowledge and skills in boards and committees and



A warehouseman picks a product order in the freezer at Northland Cold Storage. The company has more than 500,000 square feet of primarily refrigerated and frozen warehousing in Green Bay and Schofield, Wis.

Northland Cold Storage was founded as Northland Terminal and Storage in 1957 by Alvin Pokel Sr. who operated an ice and coal delivery business in Plymouth, Wis., in the 1940s. With the advent of commercial ice-making machines and the refrigerator replacing iceboxes, he needed to find a new use for his storage buildings.

With luck he obtained a precious permit during World War II to expand his business so that the dairy industry could have ice to refrigerate cheese going to the Armed Forces. Later he converted his ice facility to a cheese storage operation.

The company made its move to Green Bay in the late 1950s when Al Sr. and his two sons, Jerry and Al Jr., saw an opportunity to purchase a 50,000-square-foot Super Valu distribution warehouse in Green Bay.

businesses reap the benefits of having employees who are aware of different leadership styles and can work well with people different than they are.

The first 50 applications to the program will be accepted. Of those, 40 will be chosen to participate in the program.

Applications are available by going to www.leadershipgreenbay.org or to the main Chamber Web site at www.titletown.org. If you have any questions, please contact Jeanne Agneessens at (920) 593-3412.

After Kathy and Dave Pokel bought the business in 2000, "A lot of hard decisions had to be made," said Pokel. Prior to their purchase the business grew primarily by increasing warehouse space. For Kathy and Dave they've emphasized the profitability of square footage.

Two of their three daughters are also currently working in the business, meaning four generations of Pokels have now worked at Northland Cold Storage.

Here are a few business practices Pokel said he and his wife consider in their work:

- "If the manager or owner of the business has expectations of their workforce, they need to be realistic," said Pokel. Management needs to know what everyone's job is and it's best when they've actually done it. Pokel himself has worked in the warehouse and on the loading docks, and even dug

trenches one summer at a Northland construction site. Their outside sales manager spends half his time working in the warehouse.

- A family business can be a challenge when a husband and wife work together. He admits there are times when they've "lived and breathed" business at home, especially after purchasing Northland Cold Storage in 2000. "There were a lot of things we had to accomplish right away," he said. What's helped, he said, is that "Kathy and I have very different responsibilities." She oversees the business operation, human resources and maintenance, he the warehouse operation.

- Family businesses need to think profit and loss, said Pokel. "I think if you don't look at it objectively as a business and make business decisions first, you run into problems," he said.

- "Make sure you're not dependent on a certain type of industry or just one or two customers," said Pokel.

- Know your customers. "We try to go the extra mile and learn about each customer's business," said Pokel. Dedicated crews service each account. "They know what their product should look like," he continued, explaining, "The more proactive you are, the more they trust your judgment."

- Recognize opportunities. Their Northland Freight Services grew out of the recognition that customers were shipping partial loads of product to the same city. Provide "value-added services," said Pokel.

- Plan five to 10 years out when making business decisions.

- Be involved in the community and "contribute what you're good at," said Pokel. They serve as an overflow site for Paul's Pantry and Salvation Army and when customers have product they can't use, they put them in touch with the charitable organizations. In 2007 Northland Cold Storage also starting giving employees the opportunity to work at Paul's Pantry one day each year with pay.

For more information, see the company's Web site at www.ncold.com or call (920) 431-4601.

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For more information, call Marilyn Heim at (920) 593-3419.