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On The Move

Fourth generation steers William B. Meyer into data storage

By Kevin Moore

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Tom Gillon (seated), president of William B. Meyer Inc., has supervised the company's push northward toward Hartford. Gillon's son-in-law, Mike Racette, left, is director of order fulfillment, and son Tom Gillon Jr. is director of household goods operations.

During the early 1900s, a single truck with interchangeable cargo bodies was all William B. Meyer needed to start his local moving business. That, a strong back and a willingness to work long hours at a time when few owned trucks or automobiles of any kind, launched what has become one of the largest transportation and storage providers in the Northeast, with annual revenue exceeding \$53 million.

In recent years, the company has expanded into records management and off-site data protection, and it has emerged as a regional alternative to Iron Mountain, the global data storage giant.

Meyer's innovation, nimbleness and knack for seizing opportunities paved the way for four generations of family ownership. That spirit continues to drive the company's expansion out of southwest Connecticut and Westchester County, N.Y., through greater Hartford into Massachusetts, said Tom Gillon, Meyer's president and third-generation owner.

"People give us something to move, keep safe and return to them when they need it. Simple as that," Gillon said.

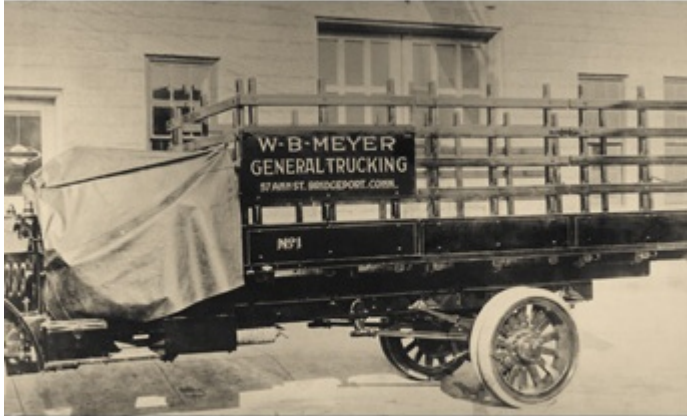
That modest philosophy, however, understates a savvy and aggressive business strategy.

While its traditional household and office moving businesses have grown in recent years, the company has diversified into the records management sector in response to new legal and regulatory requirements.

The new data services address companies' needs to comply with environmental regulations, Securities and Exchange Commission rules, Sarbanes-Oxley corporate transparency reforms and health care privacy protections mandated by the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act.

Hard Times For Movers

Diversification, such as Meyer's move into data storage business, has helped it weather the difficult times currently being experienced in the transport industry.



The original truck that William B. Meyer drove a century ago helped launch a \$53 million family transport business.

“This has been a very, very hard time for movers,” said Mike Riley, president of the Motor Transport Association of Connecticut. “The industry has been contracting over the past two years as household moves and corporate relocations have slowed, reflecting the poor economy.”

Household moves were down 18 percent in 2007 and another 14 percent through July of 2008. Those conditions prompted several movers to branch out into storage, added John Bisney, spokesperson for the American Moving and Storage Association,

a Virginia-based trade group.

But records management and data protection isn't simple, Riley noted. “It's very specialized work,” he said. “You need the space and to be able to retrieve things on demand. You've got to have the wherewithal to do it right.”

Meyer, which employs about 200, owns 75 trucks and contracts with up to 200 other independent drivers, is expanding on both the moving and storage fronts.

Gillon sees the greatest growth potential in the New York-to-Boston corridor, noting that the company has been edging steadily northward for the past 10 to 15 years.

“We are very much focused on growth and expansion opportunities,” he said. “The Hartford-Springfield area has been particularly active for us.”

In November, Meyer acquired Manchester-based PCWorldwide, an information technology asset management and recovery company. Last month, the company announced plans to buy Archive Solutions of Connecticut, a records management company in Meriden.

In 2005, the company acquired the records management assets of Bay State Moving and Storage, a Springfield, Mass. records storage provider, and its Hartford-area warehouse.

Windsor Project

Soon, the company will break ground on Phase I of a 267,000 total square-foot warehouse complex in Windsor. It will be second in size to the company's 410,000-square-foot Stratford headquarters.

Jim Burke, Windsor's director of economic development, said the warehouse represents a consolidation of Meyer's existing Windsor location on International Drive and its industrial rigging company in Bloomfield, as well as some operations from Massachusetts.

Gillon, who has supervised the push north, joined Meyer in 1973 as general manager in the rigging and industrial services division.

He became president in 1991, succeeding Lloyd Meyer, son of the founder. He is married to Lloyd's daughter, Sally.

Their son, Tom Jr., a member of the fourth generation involved in the Meyer company, directs the company's household goods operation.

Their son-in-law, Mike Racette, is director of order fulfillment for the company.

Under Gillon, the company has aggressively modernized its customer fulfillment and support operations and expanded warehousing and record management operations in Connecticut, New York and Massachusetts.

He has led the efforts to design and develop a state-of-the art book depository facility in Franklin, Mass., near Boston.

Today, the company's footprint includes more than 800,000 square feet of warehousing space, about two-thirds of it in Connecticut.

The current economic recession has not led the company to abandon its aggressive strategic approach.

"Our business is good," Gillon said. "We had a record year last year and we're going to have one this year. We spend a lot of time in our planning and we're really trying to position ourselves for where we want to be three to five years from now. I've got a great management team.

"As difficult as times are, if you're looking forward, and we are, and you're financially stable, which we are, then opportunities present themselves."