

Trucking Firm Drives on Safety, Success Carrier May Be Largest Owned By a Woman

By Julie M McKinnon

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Kim Kaplan had worked her way up the ranks at the local Refiners Transport truck terminal, but she and her husband, Dean, knew its demise was coming.

So, days after the terminal closed, the trucking industry veterans opened their own business, K-Limited Carrier Ltd., in January, 1997. The firm that hauls bulk liquids, such as petrochemicals and sulfuric acid, had revenues of \$1.2 million that first year, a number expected to reach \$10 million this year, said Mr. Kaplan, chief financial officer and vice president.

The Kaplans credit the quick growth of the firm, believed to be the nation's largest woman-owned bulk-trucking company, to a number of factors, including dedicated employees and the outgoing Mrs. Kaplan's willingness to work weekends. K-Limited started with five drivers and now has 75 employees at three locations.

"I've gotten a lot of support from my customers," said Mrs. Kaplan, president and chief executive. "We're small enough still where we can keep our arms around it and watch over it."

For customer Chet Rolak, director of transportation and logistics for Jones Hamilton Co.'s Walbridge facility, K-Limited's dedication to safety is a prime reason to keep using the firm. The 45-employee facility produces hydrochloric acid, which K-Limited hauls, and sodium bisulfate.

"When you're hauling hazardous materials," safety is paramount," Mr. Rolek said.

Last year, K-Limited ran 4.3 million miles and had an accident ration of .0000691 per million miles, earning them the national honor of being Sunoco Inc.'s tank-truck carrier of the year award for the second consecutive year. K-Limited's safety program includes multistep training for new hires.

The Toledo company had a homecoming of sorts when it bought and moved into the Matzinger Road building that housed the trucking firm started by Mr. Kaplan's father, Freightway Corp. Mr. Kaplan is president of the Toledo Trucking Association.

The business also has terminals in Detroit and Chicago, and it has a group of drivers based in Philadelphia.

The Kaplans said their biggest barrier to growth is finding qualified drivers, a necessity throughout the industry. Sixty-five of the firm's top employees are drivers, including five who were with Mrs. Kaplan at Refiner's Transport.

Their locations, though, form an advantageous triangle for trucking firms, Mr. Kaplan said.

"Toledo sits in just the best corridor you could ever ask for," Ms. Kaplan said.