

Pallets go from sideline to full-scale business

Newman - Pallets have gone from part-time sideline to booming business for a rural Newman family.

So much so that owners Norbert and Bernie Rocha were forced to find a new business home for Westside Pallet, which began operations March first at 2036 L St.

That marked a major transition for a company which was founded five years earlier at the Rocha's Draper Road residence.

"We started the business at home when I was looking for a sideline to help pay for a family wedding," Rocha noted. "About a year and a half ago we got into it pretty heavily, and we outgrew having it at home."

Pallets are an often overlooked but vital component of commerce. Today, Rocha estimates, 85 percent of goods shipped arrive at their destination aboard pallets - everything from canned goods to groceries to paper en route to printing plants.

That demand spelled opportunities for companies such as Westside Pallet, which buys, remanufactures and sells pallets to a base of more than 30 clients.

At its inception, though,

Rocha's pallet company was little more than an afterthought.

The long-time truck driver was making a delivery to a Fairfield client who inquired if Rocha might know a willing buyer to take a pile of used pallets from his yard.

"It was really coincidental. That happened just as I was looking for a sideline business," Rocha explained. "It worked out that I started supplying pallets to Stewart & Jasper and to Cebro Frozen Foods, and pretty soon I saw that there was money to be made in pallets."

The Rocha's started literally from the ground up, using hammer and nails to repair pallets and loading them on the delivery trailer by hand.

Today Westside Pallet employs 11 workers at its new site and plans to add five more before the end of the year. Workers go about their business in the clean, well-organized plant with nail guns, dismantling saws and other tools that have made the trade more efficient and accommodated the company's growth. Ramon Esquivel, the company's first employee, is shop foreman.

"I know what it is like to work for other people, and I know how important it is to treat our employee's and our customers right," Rocha noted.

"We have a very loyal group of

good employees here."

Rocha still drives truck, but now he hauls for his pallet company, making deliveries of pallets and, usually, picking up discards along the way.

"I don't come back with an empty trailer very often," he noted.

The Rocha's stress a meticulous attitude in meeting their customer demands.

Damaged wood which may find its way into some pallets is discarded, and pallets are made to exact customer specifications.

Service is also emphasized even if it means Sunday or evening deliveries to a client in need.

"We're very picky about what we do here. I want our pallets to be perfect for our customers," our way to provide quality and service.

Recycling pallets - even if it means literally cutting apart damaged units and sorting through the wood to salvage that which is still usable is one key to success

"We use as much wood as we can from the pallets we pick up," Rocha explained. "With the price of new lumber being so high, recycling old pallets is the only way to do it."

Westside Pallet buys as well as sells, he pointed out, from the general public as well as from corporate clients.

"You drove up and down the alleys and there are pallets all over the place," he noted. "If people want to get rid of them we'll buy them."



Norbert and Bernie Rocha operate Westside Pallet.

Daughter helps family business grow, thrive

Newman - Norbert and Bernie Rocha could skip the request for references or rundown of employment history when that set about hiring the administrative assistant who has become an integral part of their business.

As it turned out, the perfect person for the job was their daughter Carolyn Beach.

In a week when businesses pay tribute to the often unsung heroes of the working world by celebrating.

Administrative Professionals Day (April 21), the Rocha's and Beach each count their blessings that things worked out as they did.

Beach joined her parents' business, Westside Pallet, five years ago when the venture made the move from the Rocha's rural home to Newman's industrial area.

Beach was working in the product testing lab of a fast-food chain at the time, but was looking for other opportunities.

"I had my second daughter and was looking for a job that offered me some more flexibility," she recalled. "My parents business was just beginning to grow, and they needed somebody to come in and run the office for them."

One of Beach's first challenges was to install a computer system for payroll and accounting - tasks done by hand

Along the way, Beach has learned the pallet business inside and out.

"Everything here is recycled," Bernie Rocha said of having

hands as they occasionally travel.

"It has been excellent,"

Of course, Norbert Rocha chimed in, his daughter "has the best boss in the world."

Beach agreed.

As much as her involvement in the family business has helped her parents, she reflected, it has also created a niche for herself that offers the flexibility to devote herself to raising two daughters Abigail, 6, and Meredyth, 4.

Beach said she has always been fortunate to have positive experiences in the workplace - but none match that of working for her parents.

"I love coming to work everyday. I love working with numbers, doing the payroll and the taxes. I do feel like it is my own business. That is how I approach it everyday," she explained. "There are a lot of advantages to working for your parents. I love the flexibility it gives me. It has been very good for me, and I plan on being here a long time."



until her arrival.

Today, she oversees those departments as well as general office management in a business that has grown from six or eight employees at the time of her arrival to more than 40 at seasonal peaks.

and there are different lumbers and grades of pallets," she reflected. "There is a lot more that goes into it that people realize."

Beach has learned the business so well, her parents agreed, that they feel comfortable leaving it in her

Beach as the company's office manager. "She is so good that we are able to be gone from time to time and not have to worry about a thing. She and our foreman treat this as if it was their own business."