

## **More than meets the eye**

Warehouse Services Inc. quietly operating behind the scenes in the Tri-state

By Jonathan Watkins  
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Hidden inside three spacious storage buildings in Henderson is a thriving business that prefers to keep a low profile.

At first glance, Warehouse Services Inc. may seem like an ordinary storage facility, since much of its floor space is devoted to the large quantities of inventory it receives from around the world.

However, this third-party logistics provider ("PL") - as it is called - is much more than a simple warehousing operation.

According to WSI Commercial Manager Phillip Andrews, the multifaceted business works as a "silent partner" with companies by assisting them with the preparation and distribution of their products to both individual customers and retailers across the U.S.

"WSI provides excellence within the distribution arena by providing manufacturers a seamless link to their customers," Andrews said. "WSI typically focuses on handling materials from the end of the manufacturing line all the way to the customer's door, providing visibility during the entire trip utilizing automated distribution systems and global positioning."

WSI works with a variety of consumer and commercial goods from many well-known brands. These products include everything from bedding accessories to sporting goods to super-sized sacks of granulated plastic.

Some WSI clients simply need the company to act as a temporary holding facility for their products until they are needed by consumers, Andrews explained. WSI ensures these products are securely stored and later safely transported to their clients' customers - a major concern in post-9/11 America with today's stringent Homeland Security requirements.

"We have our own fleet of vehicles and provide transportation for all of these products," Andrews said.

Other clients ask WSI to receive bulk shipments of their products - usually from overseas - and repackage the larger items into smaller units before distribution.

"Flexibility is very important in our business," Andrews said. "We have to be responsive to the needs of our clients."

In order to better accommodate these needs, WSI quickly learned that it should make some light manufacturing services available to its customer base.

For instance, WSI purchased a number of industrial-grade sewing machines about two years ago for its Henderson operation in order to complete custom embroidery work.

"And these aren't your grandmother's sewing machines," Andrews said, as he explained WSI's willingness to purchase expensive assets in order to meet the needs of its clients.

Now, the company creates logos and designs for many different types of products, including clothing, bags and hats.

"At one time, our clients may have had to send their products overseas to be embroidered," Andrews said.

"We now provide immediate turnaround for our clients by essentially eliminating a step in the process while saving our clients the added transportation costs," he added.

While the Henderson facility focuses on embroidery, blending and distribution, WSI offers other value-added services at its various locations. For instance, one of its facilities manufactures golf balls for a sporting-goods label.

In addition to providing some manufacturing services, there are many other steps that WSI has taken to save their clients' money.

According to Joe Winiger, vice president of Midwest operations at WSI, the company is always looking for ways to operate more efficiently and cost-effectively.

"We're going greener," he said, pointing to the motion-sensor lighting throughout the large warehouse.

"If no one is working in a certain area of the building, the lights will go off until an employee returns to that area and passes under one of the sensors," he explained.

WSI has also been able to save money by creating a Technology-Services Division within the company.

"We have IT (Information Technology) specialists who write our computer programs in-house," Andrews said. "We don't have to rely on outside help for programming and software." These specialists also manage WSI's computer networks and develop programs that are compatible with the wide range of software used by WSI's clients.

Employees of the Technology-Services Division frequently travel between the roughly 100 WSI operations, which are spread across 18 states, including Kentucky, Indiana and Illinois.

There are about 17 WSI operations in the Tri-state area today. The Henderson location opened approximately four years ago in the former American Greetings gift-wrap plant; however, WSI has actually been in business since the mid-1980s.

WSI currently employs more than 4,000 personnel throughout the U.S., many working here in the region.

And while the current economy might be bleak, WSI is taking the necessary steps to remain successful.

"In today's tough economy and being in a service industry, WSI has to react faster than most businesses to fulfill our clients' ever-changing needs," Andrews said.

But the company has no plans of leaving the area.

"We really like our Henderson location," Andrews said. "It's very centralized, offering easy access going north, south, east and west, and it has a dedicated workforce."

The company executives said that WSI has been able to survive the current economic conditions by trading resources and employees between its different operations, as needed.

Winiger said the company makes every effort to retain its employees, which are considered "a part of the WSI family."

And this family has quite a bit of diversity - both in race and gender.

In fact, WSI been certified as a Women's Business Enterprise by the WBE National Council.

"We take great pride in our workforce," Winiger said. "Our people are experienced and dedicated to excellence."