

Old-fashioned values at the core of National Van Lines exec's strategy for success

BY ANNIE ALLEMAN For Sun-Times Media



Team work: Maureen Beal, chief executive officer of Broadview-based National Van Lines, goes over the company directory with receptionist Tina Byers. Byers has worked for the company for nine years and along with Beal works to make the customers moving experience the best they could have. | Mary Compton~For Sun-Times Media

National Van Lines

Address: 2800 Roosevelt Road, Broadview

Phone: (708) 450-2900

Website: nationalvanlines.com

Company revenue in 2010: \$110 million

Number of employees: 135 employees in world headquarters, with agents throughout the country

Number of trucks in the fleet: 600 units that are agent-owned and owner-operator owned

In 1929, a man named F.J. McKee started a moving business in Chicago. Eight decades later, his granddaughter is now leading that company.

Maureen Beal is chief executive officer of the Broadview-based National Van Lines, one of the largest moving companies in the country.

“We’ve often joked that if National Van Lines could start during the Great Depression in 1929, we could make it through anything,” she said.

Maureen Beal’s father, Frank McKee, was a budding star in Hollywood. With his Irish tenor voice, he appeared in several Cecil B. DeMille films and sang in a quartet with Lon Chaney Jr. When times got tough, however, he returned to Chicago to help the family business.

Now, Beal is the third generation to lead National Van Lines. Her brother, Ron McKee, heads up the company’s IT department. Carrying on the family business was important to her, not only because she has loved the business since she was young, but because she cares deeply for its employees.

“I thought it was important to keep the family culture within the company. There’s a lot of agents and drivers I have known from the time I was little girl,” she said. “I wanted to stay on and make sure they were able to do well. Now we have a whole new set of agents and drivers, and I want to stay on and make sure they’re going to do well. All in all, it’s in your blood and you can’t stay away from it.”

She started out with the company at age 20 as a switchboard operator. She worked her way up the ranks; working in claims, bookkeeping, dispatch and sales. She's even headed up the personnel and maintenance departments.

"It's really helped me through the years because I've done just about everything in this business," she said. "It gave me a wonderful base."

Although the moving industry is male-dominated, she says her gender has never been an issue.

"I've been treated very well. I speak up when I think I need to be heard, and I keep quiet when I think someone smarter than me has got the floor," she said. "It's a very close-knit industry and we all get along very well."

Moving is a stressful time in life, which is why the company's slogan is "Moving Your Memories."

"We truly do recognize that moving is not really all about the furniture. It's about items that mean a lot to the family. This is where it helps being a woman as the CEO of the company. I could tell you — and I've been married many, many years — who gave me what wedding gift in my china cabinet," she said. "We have to remember that our customers are families and taking everything they own and putting them in our care. There are a lot of memories we're moving for our customers."

National Van Lines recently rolled out an employee stock ownership plan, giving 100 percent of her company to employees, because she believes her employees deserve to have a share of the company they helped make successful.

"We've had some challenging years, but we have been doing well. I truly put that all on our employees and our agents who care about the company and want to see it succeed," she said. "I truly believe even in hard times, we can get through things if we're heading towards same goal."