

## Gulf Winds International plans future growth

*Gulf Winds International's (GWI) growth keyed on finding opportunities for customers to maximize supply chain efficiencies.*

*George Lauriat, AJOT*

Gulf Winds International (GWI) is one of Port of Houston's largest logistics providers and isn't slowing down. GWI, with the opening of their 226,000-sq/ft Bayport facility earlier this year, now has nearly one-million sq/ft of food grade and US Custom bonded space in the Port of Houston. The Houston-based warehousing and logistics company has grown rapidly since its founding back in 1996, and was recently the 2009 honoree of the La Porte-Bayshore Chamber of Commerce.

It's often said that the company they keep measures people and businesses, and GWI's client list is a "who's who" of major shippers including Sara Lee Coffee & Tea, Home Depot, Diageo North America, Coffee America USA Corp, Hiram Walker & Sons, Ltd., Mother Parkers Tea & Coffee, US Gypsum and Daltile.

GWI's Houston based facilities were ideally suited to offering a wide variety of tailored landside services. Principally GWI provides international logistics, warehousing and transportation for its clients.

Part of the reason that GWI was able to expand so quickly was due to a slightly different strategy. In an era in which the steamship lines emphasized door-to-door delivery, GWI looked to save shippers money on the landside by customizing services. In a sense GWI's strategy was to "de-bundle" supply chain services and rebuild the services around the individual clients shipping needs. It's not a formula that would work for everyone. As they say in the real-estate business, location, location, location. For GWI the phrase is "proximity equals savings." To this end GWI has secured property in strategic locations around the Port of Houston and in the Dallas/Fort Worth area.

Todd Stewart, Vice President and General Manager for GWI explained the company's strategic moves in an interview with the *AJOT*; "We were originally in town but had a desire to move to the port [Houston]. The proximity allowed shippers help shippers reduce cost with trans-loading. With the increase in fuel prices this proved to be a real cost savings for the clients. But we [GWI] took it a step further. We could max out a container... ocean freight customers could add cargo weight out rather than cubing out, again providing customer savings."

The company has three main distribution facilities, Barbours Cut, BNSF and Bayport.

GWI's 356,000-sq/ft Barbours Cut facilities are located across from the Port of Houston. The company opened the warehouse/transload facility in 2004, after a two-year build out. The company also operates the only CES (Centralized Exam Site) in Barbours Cut. The company already had plans underway for a second building in Barbours Cut when Customs & Border Protection (CBP) issued a Public Notice for bids for CES at Barbours Cut. CBP nominated Gulf Winds with a five-year contract in mid 2005 as their new CES at Barbours Cut, which has opened up new business opportunities for the company.

By the time the Port of Houston opened their Bayport facility in 2007, GWI was already for port property to serve their expanding business. Through a deal with Granite Properties (who was GWI's partner in Barbours Cut), GWI was able to locate and build a 226,000-sq/ft state of the art facility in Bayport, which opened in March of 2009.

The BNSF terminal developed a little differently than the two facilities in the Port of Houston. Home Depot, a main customer of GWI had major distribution centers at both Baytown and Dallas/Fort Worth. As a result GWI began looking for property in the Dallas/Fort Worth area. In 2007 GWI opened an office and terminal near the BNSF alliance yard. Subsequently the company added facilities at Union Pacific's rail terminal.

As a result of these strategic moves GWI is today the largest hauler (by volume) at the Port of Houston's Barbours Cut and Bayport Terminals, and, one of the largest in the Dallas/Ft. Worth Metroplex.

Stewart says there still is a lot of opportunity for expansion even in this economically challenged period. "The biggest opportunity, from our standpoint, is that there are shippers of all sizes that still use plot their supply chain on spreadsheets. GWI by harnessing the supply chain information and increasing visibility can offer savings through labor planning at the DC level or by addressing problems in the supply chain and providing alternatives...such as avoiding congestion or choke points. With greater visibility we can shorten the supply chain and that saves the customer money."