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After 94 Years, Stratford-Based Company Is Still Seizing Opportunities



Michael Burkhard erases the hard drives on a bank of computers in the William B. Meyer's computer recycling and repurposing facility. Meyer started the business as a moving company 94-years ago. (MARK MIRKO / HARTFORD COURANT / June 30, 2009)

The housing recession's grasp is long and tight, squeezing lumber yards and builders and slowing down moving companies.

But a double-digit decline nationally in residential moving last year isn't sidelining plans for a major expansion in the Hartford area by the family-run William B. Meyer Inc. moving and storage company.

The 94-year-old [Stratford](#)-based company is building a 128,000-square-foot warehouse in [Windsor](#) where it will consolidate three existing locations in [Bloomfield](#), Windsor and Manchester and create more than double the space it now occupies in the Hartford area.

Construction is expected to be completed in late spring, and a second phase of another 150,000 square feet is possible, depending on future growth.

Like other moving companies, Meyer has been hurt by the downturn in residential and corporate moving, which is the core of its operations. But the company says it has been successful in the Hartford area and has grown in recent years by expanding into new businesses, some by acquisition.

"It is our belief that we are good at what we do," said Tom Gillon, the third generation of the Meyer family to run the business, founded by his wife's grandfather. "Everyone is facing the challenges of current economic circumstances, stronger and better players will survive, and we'll be one of them."

The company is taking a big stake in the Windsor project. Meyer bought the 24-acre site on Great Pond Road a couple of years ago and will own the warehouse once it is completed. Gillon wouldn't comment on the construction costs, except to say it was "several million dollars."

Employment at the Windsor facility will initially be 75, close to its current levels in the Hartford area. The company's total workforce is about 200, plus 150 contractors in the moving operations.

Some economists believe the recession's decline is losing velocity and will bottom out this year. But any recovery is likely to be slow, they say, with businesses reluctant to add jobs and no significant boost in housing until well into next year.

The past year has been particularly difficult for the moving industry, with full-service professional movers reporting an 18 percent drop in residential moves in 2008 compared with the previous year.

While the economy is a daunting one for expansion, it may also position the company for when the recession ends, said John Bisney, a spokesman for the American Moving & Storage Association.

"When the recession is over, we believe there is going to be quite a pent-up demand for moving services," Bisney said.

From the beginning, in 1915, the company has seen opportunity where others haven't. Meyer's first line of business was moving caskets in and out of homes where funeral viewings once took place. Meyer later expanded to other livery needs connected with funerals.

In 1949, the company was a founding member of [United Van Lines](#), a cooperative that coordinated long-distance moves.

Since the 1970s, the company has expanded into record storage and computer recycling to diversify beyond its mainstay moving and storage, which includes both household goods and business equipment.

While the company ships internationally, its regional market runs from the [New York](#) to Boston corridor. Meyer hopes to capitalize on a local name that is known in that market.

"To a certain extent, consumers feel that they have been sold out by some of our major financial institutions," Gillon said. "They are looking for the security and comfort of dealing with a local provider who is here today and will be tomorrow."

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