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SUCCESS STORIES

Westmont moving company weighs in big on little moves

By DIMITRA DEFOTIS
Daily Herald Business Writer

So your family wants to send an heirloom chair to a relative in Arizona.

Or your company is transferring you to Hong Kong and you only have a small apartment's contents to move.

Jack Arslanian says most large moving companies don't want to incur the expense to serve you, or are too costly.

The result? A mistreated public which takes matters into its own hands and rents a truck or incurs even more expense, he said.

Arslanian, owner of Westmont-based MiniMoves Inc., came to that realization in his previous occupation as owner of a Pak Mail Centers of America franchise.

People were coming to him with odd-sized furniture pieces and small shipments — things large van lines snub in favor of more cost-efficient loads.

Most residential movers end up renting a truck and doing it themselves, but the cost can be more than a contract with MiniMoves, Arslanian said.

"That led me to my concept — a market that was underserved," the 52-year-old former television air-time salesman said. "We could live

Business profile

Name: Jack Arslanian, president

Age: 51

Business: MiniMoves Inc. of Westmont, a moving company geared to U.S. residential moves for customers with single items or small loads.

1994 revenues: \$1.2 million

Philosophy: "We treat people ... who have been maligned and abused because they have small loads like we're moving a five- or 10-room house."

on things that big moving companies don't want."

"The industry has blinders on. There are other ways to deliver goods," he said.

So he left the franchise and started his moving company geared to shipping small loads affordably within the United States. Slowly, an international market is growing for his service.

In an example of how he offers unique options, he said internation-



Jack Arslanian is president of MiniMoves Inc. of Westmont, a moving company geared to customers with small loads.

Daily Herald Photo/Tanit Jarusar

al customers can pick up cargo at foreign ports and go through customs themselves — often a less costly alternative to up front moving fees for door-to-door service.

Often, he said, air freight for seemingly large loads — boxes of clothing, for instance — is less expensive than shipment by sea typically chosen by large moving companies.

"The only thing we have to sell is the service. The niche is an arena where we can service people that have been maligned," he said. "People don't expect good service for small loads. When we give them

the unexpected, we shake them up."

The unexpected includes computerized cost estimates and spruce foam packaging. Those and other details have attracted customer including an East Coast custom furniture maker and several executives who have move frequently.

One customer, a human resource director for the hotel company Marriott International Inc., sent MiniMoves a \$50 check on top of her bill to say thanks for special care given to antiques moved from

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Chicago to Kalamazoo, Mich.

Arslanian has developed relationships with larger moving companies that siphon such small moves his way.

He boasts a good record for delivering undamaged cargo: Arslanian says only one in 100 of his loads is lost or damaged, compared with the industry average of 25 in 100.

That reputation has allowed him networking privileges through memberships in the Better Business Bureau and the National Moving Association, he said.

Founded in 1991, the company employed 5 at the start and now has 36 on the payroll.

The company brought in \$120,000 in its first year and had \$1.2 million in sales last year. Sales have doubled annually, he said.

The company has moved to larger digs three times in the past two years; Arslanian said the company will move again this year to double its current 13,000 square feet of office and storage space.

"I'm so excited because the prospects for growth are limitless," he said.

Arslanian said all his moves are residential in nature and that more than half of his jobs are generated by corporate transfers.

Much of the company's business is Illinois-based, although Arslanian has advertised and set up small offices in New York and Arizona markets where he hopes to increase business. As the business world becomes more global, foreign markets will represent more of his business, Arslanian said.

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