

WATCH DBA, THE BUSINESS SHOW ON CHANNEL 11 EVERY SUNDAY AT 11A.M.

DBA

HOUSTON'S BUSINESS SOURCE

The Most Dangerous Excuse In Business
By Larry Sachnowitz

Houston Legend: Albert Thomas

DISPLAY UNTIL AUGUST 15 \$1.95

Watson Van & Storage
Company is moving into
its third generation of...

One family moving another



DBA Interview:
Jim McIngvale



Evalee Schwarz:



COVER STORY

One Family

to the tune of \$3 million a year!

"Let's face it," says Butch Butcher, president of Watson Van and Storage Co., "there is almost nothing more personal than moving. You have to dig around in your closets and attics and get out all those old things you've held onto for so long. This, plus the unsettling thoughts about a new home, is why moving has been called one of life's most stressful events. They say that only death and divorce cause more stress."

Butcher should know. His family has been in the moving business since 1974 when his father bought Watson Van and Storage Co. from Bennett Watson. The Butcher family has a history of business ownership, primarily in the transportation industry. While it seems only natural that K.D. Butcher's son join his family in their business, Butch stresses that it was his love for the business that drew him to it, and that love for it is what keeps him there. This, he says, is one of the keys to success for entrepreneurs. "You must love what you do in order to keep going through the valleys – the hard times. Riding the peaks is easy, anybody can do that."

By Mark Weisser
Photography by Evin Thayer



Moving Another...

When the Butcher family bought the moving company in 1974, they also bought a piece of Houston's history. Baron Watson hung out a sign in 1925 proclaiming Watson Furniture and Storage Co. open for business. The company was located at 704 Pease. Moving was simpler back in those days. Cheaper, too. Their advertising read, "Moving special - 3 rooms as low as \$3.75, 4 rooms as low as \$4.75."

Bennett Watson, Baron's son, took over the business in the 1940s. From then until 1974, the company moved a few times, joined Atlas Van Lines in 1948 as its first agent in Houston, changed its name (slightly) a few times, became incorporated and grew.

Butch Butcher joined his father with a full time commitment to the company in 1979, taking over the reins as president in 1989 at the age of 32. Watson Van and Storage Co. now resides on Holly Hall, right at Hwy 288. Their warehouse has a capacity of 42,000 square feet. The company's 50 employees' hard work and commitment to their customers will bring in \$3 million this year.

"One of the distinctions of our company I like to point out," says Butcher, "is that we are basically 'families moving families.' Our family - and that really has to include our employees too - moves our customers' families. This makes a difference."

The moving industry is an interesting one. Small 'Mom and Pop' movers operate in nearly the same arena as the largest movers. "Nearly the same" means that although the smaller movers will not be moving large companies' offices or handling international family relocations, they still provide a moving service; they still pack, load, transport and unload people's possessions.

Watson Van and Storage Co. operates as an agent of Atlas Van Lines. This means the company has several advantages in the

The Board of Directors at Watson Van & Storage Co.:
Mrs. Wanda Butcher, Butch and Karen Butcher



"The key to any business," Butcher added,

"is to balance out these peaks and

valleys – to manage your capacity. Capacity

management, productivity, plus quality

people and resources – that's how you do it."



moving marketplace. First, it means that Watson offers a network of agents across the country to help make moving a good experience for its customers.

Experience has shown the people at Watson the value of good agency connections at the other end of a move from Houston, or from somewhere else to Houston. "Or, for that matter," Butcher comments, "from Newark to Los Angeles. Our corporate clients often have us arranging the moving of their employees' families, whether Houston is involved or not."

From the operations viewpoint, the association with Atlas Van Lines makes it the largest source of business for Watson Van and Storage Co. Butcher explained that "although we have as some of our



sarily what you'll find in Missoula, MT – and it ought to be," he says. "This is the beginning of a standard of performance to help our customers make the best choice for a very personal event. As a company, we promote professionalism, and not just at Watson Van and Storage Co., but in the van lines and within the moving industry."

corporate clients companies like Compaq, Texaco, B.F.I., and HL&P, the referrals and business from the Atlas network is still the biggest piece of our business."

While everyone always wants to know about the 'big' customers, Butcher emphasizes that there are no moving jobs too small. His comments on the competition in this marketplace were that "we are an 'affordable' mover – we may not be as cheap as some, but our value is top-notch. And we can accommodate anyone who wants to do part of it themselves."

The disparity of quality and care in companies in the moving industry has not only provided Watson's customers a large variety of moving companies to choose from, but also a wide variety of service and performance as well. As Butcher very politely says, "service in our industry is not exactly 'homogeneous.'"

As a board member of two moving associations (and member of several others), Butcher advocates the implementation of performance standards for the moving industry. "What we pack a set of china with here in Houston is not neces-

Watson Van and Storage Co. has a tradition of high standards, and this comes from high personal standards that filter down to all the employees: standards that bring repeat business. As an example, Butcher pointed out the story of a woman in Houston that has moved five times with the company. She's eighty years old!

In a service business such as the moving industry, employees are the primary asset. The customers witness the employees coming into their homes, going through their closets and handling their cherished possessions. For Watson, only the best will do. You won't find any refugees from society or the temporary labor pool here.

"We require that our employees pass a rigorous health exam prior to starting work here. And we drug test everyone, including me," Butcher explains. "Our drug-free policy, training programs and health screening allow us to keep work related injuries low enough to actually participate in conventional workman's compensation insurance." (Not many moving companies can say that.)



K.D. Butcher, first generation owner of Watson Van & Storage Company. (left) Here, against Houston's emerging skyline of the 1960s, Watson trucks dot the landscape. The city and the company have grown side by side.

This is an example of how the company adds value to its service through experience. The peak season for the moving industry is June, and Watson and other moving companies must be geared for the demand. A different challenge comes during the rest of the year. In the slower times, rather than using temporary help or laying off its employees, the company supplements its conventional moving business with additional projects such as distribution, office relocations, and even the auto show at the Astrodome.

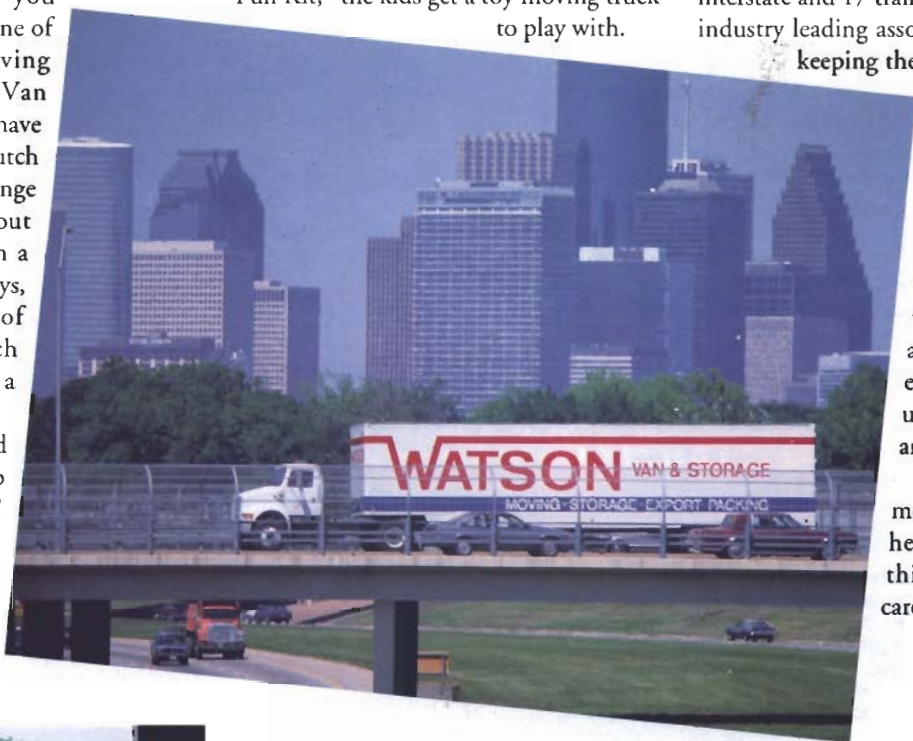
"The key to any business," Butcher added, "is to balance out these peaks and valleys – to manage your capacity. Capacity management, productivity, plus quality people and resources – that's how you do it."

While qualities such as these may not totally surprise you when reading about one of Houston's top moving companies, Watson Van and Storage Co. does have some surprises left. Butch Butcher wants to change people's attitudes about moving. "We live in a mobile society," he says, "where 20 percent of the people move each year. We want to be a family tradition."

Have you heard of a musical group called the 'Movin' Men'? Watson has assembled a group of professional musicians and has record-

ed a collection of music with a moving theme. There are so many songs about moving, and it is such a major part of our culture that the company wants its customers to celebrate their move – not dread it. "Our customers can play their tape on the way to their new home," Butcher explains. "We want their move to be done in a way that makes people happy. To take the stress out of it." Songs like 'Route 66' played in the group's jazz and Texas swing style help make moving an adventure – not just a chore.

And what about the kids? Often overlooked, kids feel the stress of moving, too. Especially when they see their toys packed up, and have to wave goodbye to their friends. Watson Van and Storage Co. hasn't forgotten them, and has a treat for them, too. Called the "Little Buddy Fun Kit," the kids get a toy moving truck to play with.



Observing a move, young Jeffrey Butcher represents the third generation of a family moving families.

Running a business that brings in \$3 million annually, managing 50 employees, a fleet of trucks (12 local units, 6 interstate and 17 trailers), participating in industry leading associations and always **keeping the customer first isn't**

easy. Making the stressful experience of moving fun and adventurous for families is even harder. But that is what motivates Butch Butcher and his family of employees known to us as Watson Van and Storage Co.

"As our family moves other families," he says, "we do the things that say...we care." **DBA**



"We live in a mobile society," he says.