The PULSE of the community

Submitted photo

Robert Bearden Inc. started with three trucks. It now has 165 trucks and 440 trailers.

RBI delivers products, not excuses

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CAIRO — More and more companies are discovering one of the best ways to move their products is through Robert Bearden Inc., a family-owned Cairo business that has continually expanded over its 11 years of existence.

"I started the company in July 1997," Robert Bearden said. "I'd worked in corporate but wanted to own and run my own business. I started out with three trucks and I now have 165 trucks and 440 trailers."

RBI predominately runs truck load freight and is a 53-foot dry van carrier throughout nine southern states, but also services the Midwest, Texas and California.

The company has 175 employees — one of the largest employers in Grady County — and hauls in $25 million in revenue annually.

"We work with many Fortune 500 companies," Hollie Bearden, vice president of sales and marketing, said. "We carry food, industrial and consumer goods products. It's really rewarding to be associated with Fortune 500 companies because we are, in the scheme of things, a small carrier. When the larger companies have a need and can experience our service and ease of doing business with us, we can differentiate ourselves from our competitors. It speaks volumes to be reputable in the transportation industry. Whenever we land a big customer it always surprises me; to have the big companies out there and the little guy comes in and do as good as — if not better — job than the larger carriers."

Teresa Wiliams/Times-Enterprise

Robbie Bearden explains a truck dispatch to his sister Hollie, father Robert and mother Betty Bearden, accounting manager.

Robert Bearden thinks many manufacturers are doing business with smaller carriers due to their "lack of bureaucracy."

"We have one of the newest fleets in the industry, up-to-date technology and an operations/driver team that far exceeds our competitors," he said. "Our low levels of bureaucracy and empowerment within our organization allow you to get the answers you want when you need them. Our motto at RBI is, 'We deliver unparallel on-time service (claim and accident free), not excuses.'"

Hollie and her brother Robbie (who works in operations) each own 24 percent of the business, with their father, Robert, holding the majority at 52 percent.

"I did it for me and for them," Robert Bearden said. "Today, I couldn't do it without them."

Several facts make RBI unique, the Beardens said.

Hollie Bearden said many are surprised to learn of RBI's size (headquarters are in Cairo, but most of the trucks are dispatched from Valdosta).

"We're a unique carrier because we use auxiliary power units on our trucks to reduce fuel consumption and comply with SmartWay, a way to reduce our footprint on the environment," she said.

Robert Bearden said many who don't know about the company think it's something completely different.

"Most think we're brokers," he said. "We are an asset based carrier. At RBI, we believe our size and ability to carve out niche markets in the supply chain are our competitive advantage. All freight that goes on our trucks and trailers also have satellite tracking on them. We try to have the best of the best as far as computer software."

RBI is also looking to continue to expand to better serve its customers.

"We are looking to expand out of this area," Robert Bearden said. "We feel like we've covered this market and want to build our customer base."