

This Was Printed From Jacksonville Business Journal

## New World Orders

**Jacksonville Business Journal - by Lisa R. Schoolcraft**

Date: Monday, March 4, 2002, 12:00am EST

Ed Kostenski shipped a reconditioned Caterpillar bulldozer to Russia last month, his first order to that country. New orders are rolling in from other countries, too.

Last week, representatives from a Holland company and a Caribbean firm visited his office, all interested in buying the refurbished heavy equipment his Jacksonville company sells, he said.

The meaning of all this largess? Kostenski, president of [Nationwide Equipment](#), credits his winning the national President's E Award for excellence in exporting last year.

"Since the E Award we've noticed an increase in international sales to some of the strangest places, places we've never sold to before," he said.

### Sight unseen

The shipment to Vladivostok, Russia, was one of those strange places. The bulldozer had to be shipped on tight schedule so it could make a two-week trek across a frozen lake before the late March thaw, Kostenski said. Otherwise, Amur Machinery might have to wait a year to take delivery of its equipment.

Amur Machinery contacted Nationwide through recommendations made by the U.S. Department of Commerce. The E Award program is managed by the U.S. Commercial Service, a Commerce Department unit that helps U.S. companies, particularly small and mid-sized companies, sell their products globally.

Amur Machinery bought the bulldozer from Nationwide sight unseen.

"He didn't know me from a bar of soap, but he trusted me," Kostenski said. "Over the next several years they will need more equipment, so we may get more orders."

The E Award "is a huge honor," said Joann Emslie-Korn, director of international economic development for the Jacksonville Chamber of Commerce. "People don't realize that. The Department of Commerce only gives out about 10 a year."

Kostenski heard about the award 10 years ago and applied for it. He was surprised when he won last year. President John F. Kennedy created the E Award in 1961 as the nation's highest award to honor American exporters.

The chamber has worked with Kostenski, 39, for about four years and has seen his company's growth.

"It just goes to show that even in tough times, if Ed can get business overseas, he keeps his employees, and diversifies his market and his customers," Emslie-Korn said. "Exporting allows companies to grow."

Kostenski and his staff have been active with the chamber's trade missions, particularly to Latin American countries, Emslie-Korn said.

That has led to even more business. For example, Kostenski cites new business in Venezuela, St. Maarten, and Africa.

"We just did a big deal to Nigeria," he said. "This one we're very proud of because that is one of the most difficult countries to do business with."

Nigeria's banking system has a poor credit rating and it's difficult to get money from businesses there, Emslie-Korn said. "If he's able to succeed there, that's a real coup."

### Traveling man

"I've traveled to 42 countries, all for business," he said.

Kostenski, an Illinois native, started Nationwide Equipment on his kitchen table in 1983 with no capital.

"I operated as a broker, but I had no fax, no cell phone," he said.

By 1994 he'd built a facility on New Kings Road and has continually added to it. He's getting ready to add a 7,000-square-foot workshop "solely for these big machines."

In 1999, Kostenski also added a heavy equipment rental division to his firm.

Nationwide had \$15.3 million in sales in 2001, up from \$13 million in 2000. Kostenski is hoping to have \$20 million in sales this year.

"If the world economy would pick up 2 [percent] to 3 percent, that would put us in the \$20 million range," he said.

Kostenski credits his Christian faith with keeping his business strong.

"Whenever I don't know what to do, I just put my trust in the Lord," he said. "I just do more than the customer expects."