

## **\$6.5M African equipment deal shows exporter's tenacity**

### **Big order's logistical success also speaks to port's abilities**

By Tony Quesada, Staffwriter

JACKSONVILLE - A two-minute conversation with a subcontracted worker in the late afternoon on May 14 ended with [Ed Kostenski](#) spending another \$15,000 in unanticipated costs.

But it hardly fazed him as he walked around a vehicle holding lot at the Jacksonville Port Authority's Blount Island Marine Terminal, where more than 100 pieces of refurbished heavy earth-moving and road building equipment waited to be [shipped](#) to West Africa.

Kostenski, [president](#) of [Nationwide Equipment](#), a Jacksonville-based exporter of [used heavy equipment](#), had already been paid \$6.5 million for the largest such shipment - large enough to require chartering an entire ship to go from Jacksonville to West Africa. The need to authorize several thousand dollars for extra tie-down chains or for immediate glass repair on an [excavator](#) was a minor setback in completing what Kostenski sees as a "deal sent from heaven."

It began when Nationwide's director of international marketing, Michael Allen, while relaxing in a hotel swimming pool in Liberia, overheard a conversation in Hebrew, one of the four languages he speaks. After introducing himself and joining in, Allen learned his new acquaintance was a contractor looking to build major infrastructure in the area and who needed a lot of equipment.

"It turned into one big order," Kostenski said, an order that included [cranes](#), [compactors](#), [bulldozers](#), [excavators](#) and [water trucks](#).

Finding all the equipment on the contractor's shopping list and for two other smaller customers in the area was a challenge that extended as far away as Pennsylvania. But then came the really hard part: [refurbishing](#) all the equipment. Kostenski said Nationwide hired 10 subcontractors from Jacksonville and beyond to help.

The next obstacle was delivering the goods. Although transporting the equipment to Blount Island required several local trucking and wrecker service companies, even trickier was booking space on a ship to West Africa. None of the shipping lines with regular sailings to the region could accommodate such a massive delivery, so Nationwide had to charter a 400-foot ship to move the 9,000 cubic meters of equipment, a prospect made complicated by world events.

"The United States is taking all the roll-on-roll-off ships for transporting military equipment," said Greg Diaz, president of International Frontier Forwarders, a Houston-based shipping broker that works extensively arranging carriers to transport heavy equipment.

But Diaz's company was able to find the Baltic Link, a Norwegian ship, to carry the equipment for about \$500,000. Kostenski plans to use the ship again along with International Frontier Forwarders.

Despite a host of last-minute corrections, loading the ship May 15 went fairly smoothly and took only nine and a half hours, said Nationwide service manager Nick Haag, whose supervision Kostenski credits with ensuring the equipment was ready by the shipping date.

"We bettered our schedule by about a day," Haag said.

"Kostenski said 16 Nationwide employees, essentially everyone capable of driving the equipment, were called in to help.

When it was finished, there was a "sense of pride," Haag said. "Everyone was happy we had accomplished it that quick."

The shipment helped Nationwide exceed its earning projections for the year; and Kostenski said he intends to make employees even happier by issuing bonuses.

Haag said the process yielded a number of lessons learned.

"This was the first time with this large an order for us," Haag said. "I think we'll even get it down better the next time."

That next time should come soon, Kostenski said, as the primary customer from last week's shipment plans to place two more orders. He said the new business relationship has led to other regional contacts also looking for heavy equipment.

"We're in negotiations with several people for orders of a similar size or larger," Kostenski said. "This was definitely a deal sent from heaven."

Although the size of the shipment was novel, port authority Communications Director Robert Peek said there is a lot of experience in Jacksonville for moving that type of equipment, which officials hope will encourage others to follow along.

"When others see this type of shipment, it educates them that we have this capability and that Jacksonville is a viable choice," Peek said. "It's a reminder within the industry that if you're looking to move [roll-on-roll-off cargo], that Jacksonville is a good choice.

And for those who don't notice, the port's marketing people will be sure to point it out.

"When we do our brochures and presentations, we'll be able to show that it's not theory - it's practice - that this went through Jacksonville," Peek said.

Besides the size and scope of the shipment showing off the port's physical capabilities, also not lost on port officials is that the shipment's destination helps them diversify, Peek said.

"We're trying to see more movements of cargo to markets that are not traditional for us," Peek said. "It's nice to see Jacksonville expanding our horizons in terms of our trading partners."



**Ed Kostenski, president of Nationwide Equipment, says the West African deal is "sent from heaven."**



**More than 100 pieces of heavy equipment are queued to be loaded on a chartered ship at Blount Island Marine Terminal. The shipment, destined for West Africa, is this area's largest.**