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Nationwide Equipment wins nation's top exporting award

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The U.S. Department of Commerce awarded a Jacksonville company the President's "E" Award for contributions to the increase of U.S. trade abroad.

Nationwide Equipment Co. won the award for Excellence in Exporting. The award was created by executive order of the president in 1961 as the nation's highest award to honor American exporters.

Nationwide Equipment refurbishes used heavy construction equipment. It increased its export business to buyers in more than 40 countries since its founding in 1983.

"We go all over the country and find older machines, refurbish them and ship them to many countries that can't afford the new equipment," said President Ed Kostenski. Exports are 60 percent to 70 percent of Nationwide's business, he said.

Last year, Nationwide shipped 200 machines overseas, Kostenski said. The remaining business is in rental equipment, he said.

"When we first heard about the award in 1992, we were so small," he said. "We only had three employees and we'd only began exporting in 1990. We wondered if we would ever win it."

Today, Nationwide has 50 employees and revenue of \$14 million to \$15 million, Kostenski said.

The firm's biggest markets include Central and South America, the Caribbean and the Middle East, he said.

"Florida is a major powerhouse in trade, ranking ninth in the United States," said John McCartney, director of the U.S. Export Assistance Center in Miami. "A significant portion of Florida-origin exports originate in Jacksonville. ... Nationwide Equipment is a premiere example of the creativity and determination that are hallmarks of exporters who achieve the status associated with the President's E-Award for excellence in exporting."

The "E" award program is managed by the U.S. Commercial Service, a Commerce Department unit that helps U.S. companies, particularly small and midsized companies, sell their products globally.

Last year the Commercial Service helped U.S. businesses generate export sales worth more than \$21 billion.

Florida Wire and Cable in Jacksonville won the same award in 1995. Prior to that, Northeast Florida winners included Moore Dry Kiln Co. in Jacksonville and Diesel Engine Sales in St. Augustine, said Katheryn Dye, spokeswoman for the Commerce Department.

New Zealand ambassador visits

New Zealand Ambassador Jim Bolger visited several Jacksonville firms last week during a brief stop in the River City.

Bolger, at the invitation of Jacksonville-based Rayonier (NYSE: RYN), visited Rayonier's Jesup, Ga., plant and also met with officials at Winn-Dixie Stores (NYSE: WIN).

"People might be surprised at the number of connections Jacksonville has with New Zealand," he said. For example, Winn-Dixie is "a significant user of sheep meats and fish products."

Bolger, who served as prime minister of New Zealand from 1990 to 1997, last visited the city in 1976.

"Jacksonville is a significantly different city since then," Bolger said. "This city has business opportunities here for New Zealand companies. My job is to encourage [those businesses] to seek them out."