

## Eagle's Wings Vows to Keep Winning Business After 5-Year Mark

Eagle's Wings Air recently celebrated its fifth year in business, and it's looking forward to many more anniversaries.

Frank Kaiser, president and CEO of the Fort Wayne, Ind.-based company, reports that 2012 was a record year, and he has no intention of slowing down the pace of growth. "The first quarter of this year was a record quarter," he says. "And even though we are five years into this, we are still educating funeral directors on what we do and how we can help them."

By now, Kaiser hopes that most funeral professionals understand that Eagle's Wings Air is not a traditional shipping company – and it's certainly not an airline. When funeral directors call a "shipping company," they are relying on that company to do the removal, embalming and any necessary documentation – "and if that shipping service is *not* using Eagle's Wings Air, it hunts flights and manages that process on its own."

Eagle's Wings, he explains, only takes care of booking and managing the flight process – and it works with numerous shipping companies to make sure human remains safely get from Point A to Point B. "So the shipping service is a funeral service oriented company that specializes in funeral service related tasks, and they also happen to be involved in transportation," Kaiser says. "If that shipping service is not calling Eagle's Wings Air, they are by default managing logistics on their own."

Kaiser says his company is different because Eagle's Wings is a logistics company that only manages air transportation. "If you call EWA, you are going to focus on your core competency – serving your client families – and EWA is going to join your team as it relates to the air transportation of human remains," he says. "We are going to make sure we look at all the options for the ship-ins and ship-outs, all the carriers, all the rates, all the schedules. And we are going to put together the best transportation solution to serve that family and protect the reputation of our funeral home clients."

The reason Kaiser works so hard on behalf of his clients is that reputations are on the line. In the event something goes wrong, EWA has the relationships to get problems fixed, he says. "The fact is that Eagle's Wings Air is the number one customer of any airline from a human remains perspective, and we've been actively managing these corporate-level relationships for five years now." He adds, "We have considerable leverage as an advocate for funeral service."

Kaiser also sounded off on a number of other shipping related issues ...

### The Known Shipper Program

By now, most funeral homes that do any shipping at all are known shippers with at least one airline. And those who aren't should definitely think about doing so, Kaiser says. "My recommendation to anyone in funeral service – even if you have just a single location – I'd recommend to go ahead and spend 15 minutes and become a known shipper with a major carrier you might use," he says. "How does any funeral director know when someone might walk into their firm and require that service?"

### The Transportation Security Administration's Certified Cargo Screening Program

The TSA mandated that after Aug. 1, 2010, all cargo needed to be 100 percent screened. It was unclear how hard it was going to be for airlines to comply with that request, so leading up to the deadline – and even after it passed – it encouraged funeral homes to become designated as certified cargo screeners.

Under the optional program, a funeral service professional allocates a portion of his or her facility to the screening process. The application process takes months, and once you've gone through the process and had the appropriate background checks, you can do the screening on your own and for other funeral

homes that tender remains to your facility.

Only a few dozen funeral homes have become certified cargo screeners, and Kaiser thinks that number isn't likely to grow. "Everything that was happening 12 months before the deadline for 100 percent screening was driven by the fact that we didn't know, the airlines didn't know and funeral service didn't know if the airlines would ultimately have the capacity to screen 100 percent of cargo being tendered to the airline," he says. "So everything leading up to that was driven by the concern that there'd be a significant bottleneck on the airline docks."

But what actually happened is that the airlines implemented the necessary technology and training needed to handle the process and prevent significant bottlenecks. "So I would liken that event to Y2K," Kaiser says. "It was exactly the same. There were all these concerns, and then we got through it."

The certified cargo screeners in business can certainly use the distinction as a way to differentiate themselves from competitors in the shipping business, and who knows what the future might hold, Kaiser says. "Anyone actively involved in that program – if for whatever reason the airlines could not screen human remains – then they would be positioned to help serve their local market," Kaiser says.

### **Not All Carriers are Equal**

Kaiser notes that when two airlines merge, problems often result – and they need to be ironed out.

While he doesn't want to mention any carriers by name, he does note that when there is a merger, there can often be "brain drain." Key people leave and service levels can be affected.

Kaiser adds that Eagle's Wings will seek to continue to keep lines of communication open for all carriers. "We manage service performance of all our

### **Reflections After Five Years**

Dave McComb, chairman of Eagle's Wings Air and the owner of D.O. McComb & Sons Funeral Homes in Fort Wayne, Ind., saw a prime opportunity to develop a new service for funeral directors when he and Frank Kaiser put their heads together several years ago.

Five years after opening for business, McComb – the main investor in the company – is a happy man. "The concept of EWA has turned into the growing success of EWA thanks to the tireless efforts and proactive service mindset of Frank and his great team," McComb says.

Given that customers also give Kaiser good reviews, it seems for now, his job as CEO of the company is secure. "There is a considerable amount of work in arranging and managing the transportation of human remains, which means there are a lot of chances for something to go wrong," says John Horan, owner of Horan & McConaty Funeral Homes in Aurora, Colo. "Having a partner like EWA to manage this process from start to finish provides funeral home owners with incredible peace of mind and helps make us the hero in the eyes of our client families."

Andy Kirschner, director of North American sales for Delta Cargo, says that McComb and Kaiser make the perfect team. "I've certainly seen firsthand the company's impact on how we work with funeral homes for these important and delicate situations," he says. "They've been a great partner to us, and we are excited for them as they celebrate this anniversary."

Bob Inman, chairman of Inman Shipping Worldwide in Cleveland, also praises the company. "EWA ranks as one of the most innovative, service-oriented and customer-focused companies I've worked with in my 35 years in the industry," he says. "As a leader in the shipping segment, we at Inman are proud to call EWA a strong and valued partner."

Kaiser is looking forward to many more landmark anniversaries. "I want to extend sincere thanks to everyone who's made this anniversary possible – our employees, colleagues, friends, families and, most importantly, our funeral home and shipping service clients." He adds, "And while we are grateful to be able to take this opportunity to look back on our first five years, at the same time we remain focused on looking forward as we will continue to strengthen our service model and offer new value over the next five years and beyond."

carrier partners on a daily basis and have regular weekly conference calls with three airlines to discuss service issues,” he says. “You could classify us as the biggest squeaky wheel for carriers, but that’s what we need to do to maintain our focus.”

### **Funeral Homes Need to Do a Better Job Embracing Technology**

It’s encouraging to see more funeral homes buying computers, but too many continue to rely on outdated technology, Kaiser says. For instance, “our community is still holding onto that fax machine very tightly when we can scan documents and email documents at no cost,” he says. “That allows for more control over the transfer of information, and hopefully, we’ll see more funeral homes removing the fax machine and moving more toward email, which is a big opportunity in the shipping of human remains.”

### **Eagle’s Wings Will Remain Vigilant About Winning New Business**

Already, the company handles the logistics of booking and managing flights for Inman Shipping Worldwide, more than 2,000 Service Corporation International locations worldwide and numerous other firms.

Kaiser has his eyes set on other big companies and shipping services, and he wants them to know that Eagle’s Wings won’t stop trying to reach out to them. “We are here to serve any funeral home and shipping service across the country,” he says.