

Focus

Business

Markham couriers rush to succeed

By GILLIAN PRITCHARD
Canada Post's troubles have provided a bonanza for courier services. Along with the big national and international services, 17 local services are making sure Markham area businesses have a quick, efficient delivery service. Sending mail by courier may be more expensive, but if it prevents lost orders or ensures that a contract gets in before the deadline, then it soon pays for itself.

Local couriers are prospering in what is a highly competitive field because they're on the spot and can give fast, personal attention. They've been quick to see a need they can fill and at the same time, it seems businesses are happy to hand over messenger chores so that company employees can

get on with their own work.

Carved niche

Most Markham courier services have managed to carve out a special niche for themselves. The largest, Markham Courier Service Ltd., has 25 drivers and 40 part timers and boasts pick up in 10 minutes. Smaller operations, such as The Messenger, offer a more personal and specialized service. With three employees, they pick up and take business mail directly to and from the post office, saving several hours on regular mail delivery, crucial for corporations who want to get business done during regular office hours. Some couriers work only for certain professions such as lawyers or engineers. Either way, all have made themselves indis-

pensable to Markham's business community.

Markham's oldest courier service, Hinan Courier Service, started in Markham 29 years ago and today is run by the founder's daughter, Pam Dobson. She employs five men and women but does many of the deliveries herself. "Some of our customers have been with us as long as 10 and 15 years," she says.

Dobson worked in a bank and a law office before taking over from her father when he retired in 1985. She already knew the ropes — "I'd always helped out." Much of their business is in providing mail service to tenants of new industrial parks who initially don't receive service from Canada Post.

Radio-dispatched

P & H Couriers is a division of a Unionville printing company, P & H White Printing Ltd. on Don Park Road. It was founded because the printers found themselves doing most of their own deliveries. Now they do deliveries for other printers, as well. While they specialize in deliveries of plans to architects and engineers

in the Toronto downtown core, they also offer a radio-dispatched courier service to anyone in Markham. Wayne Pilkington Jr., son of the president, says the courier division has been running for seven years, has seven cars and vans, four drivers and several printers who'll double as delivery men when necessary.

A fleet of 20 bright yellow vans gives Markham Courier Service Ltd. high visibility. Their speciality is short notice deliveries and they guarantee pickup in 10 minutes. President Sam Khawli saw the need for a messenger service as early as 1979 while he was a Markham taxi driver. The family business started the same year and includes two brothers. They either work or have done work for every major company in Markham. According to Khawli, it's a very competitive business because people are always looking for a better rate.

take mail directly to Canada Post's sorting office on Progress Avenue in Scarborough. Businesses who'd been delegating a staff member to get a jump on mail deliveries were glad to hand over the chore.

Special deliveries

He now employs two other drivers and also offers banking as well as registered and special delivery mail services. When he's not on the road, he's busy drumming up more business. His phone number, says it all: 479-MAIL.

When Doug Marshman started his Soaring Eagle Courier service in Stouffville earlier this year after leaving a career in retail management, one of his first assignments was buying tickets for a Blue Jays game at the ball park for a Stouffville executive. More recently, he picked up tickets to a rock concert for a legal secretary. Neither could take the time to go downtown to buy tickets.

Although Marshman now works a six day week, he's thoroughly enjoying it because "I'm my own boss." He crisscrosses Metro Toronto several times a day, delivering packages and letters from the Stouffville area to downtown. He also delivers airline tickets to passengers for the travel service where his wife works as well as flowers to hospital patients, right to the room if necessary.

Same-day guarantee

Marshman guarantees same day delivery to downtown Toronto for \$9 but will provide rush service for a higher fee and says "my first two stops cover costs." He does regular runs for freelancers such as consultants, writers and artists who live and work in small communities but need to send their completed projects to city employers. He employs one fulltime and one part time helper.

Can so many courier services continue to survive? While none can compete directly with the giants such as Purolator, it seems there's still plenty of local business there for the picking.

Charged by mile

For a lower fee, you can choose Markham Courier's 90-minute service, four hours, or same day, all charged by the mile at different rates. Companies pay by the zone (Markham is divided up into 16 areas) and according to whether they are steady customers. Faster service costs more but "we're 40 per cent cheaper than a taxi cab," Khawli said. "Our most unusual service is delivering heart valves from a pharmaceutical supplier to hospitals."

Perhaps noting the success of the older established local courier services, several smaller operations have got into the act comparatively recently. For example, Patrick Tullock, a former cosmetic salesman, started his courier service, The Messenger, a year and a half ago when he noticed that Markham businesses were getting their mail deliveries at 11 a.m., which meant that half the working day was being wasted and decisions delayed. He offered to pick up company mail at the post office and deliver it by 9 a.m., then return in the afternoon to

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