

## **Thompson Emergency Freight Systems**



*Mark Bortolotti, Director of Sales*

Thompson Emergency Freight Systems is a privately owned company that's been in business since 1985. The company is under the same original ownership, where the owners are still very active in the day-to-day operations. Thompson's central operation is located in Tecumseh near highway 401 just east of Windsor, Ontario. However, their fleet of owner operators live across Ontario and Quebec.

Company President (and an original founder) Mike Ouellette feels that the reason why Thompson has performed so successfully year after year is simple, "We have been able to keep together a long-standing core team of experienced dedicated managers and staff. The knowledge and expertise our team is able to deliver keeps our customer-base growing. Our managers are given the authority to run their department as if they own it."

The company began as a cross-border expedite company whose portfolio consisted primarily of the big three automotive companies and OEM suppliers. Today they do business with a diversified customer base including many of North America's top Fortune 500 companies. Their fleet has expanded to include dedicated and open board Full Truckload services. The tractor-trailer division is also owner-operator based.

Director of Sales, Mark Bortolotti explains, "We have one of the largest Ontario based owner-operator fleets in the

Canadian expedite industry, evenly split between cargo and sprinter vans, dock level straight trucks and tractor trailers. We used to employ more cargo vans, but many of these owner-operators are upgrading and replacing their equipment and purchasing sprinter vans. Sprinter vans can carry more weight than a regular cargo van and are very fuel efficient. For these reasons, a sprinter van is a good starting point for somebody considering becoming an owner-operator with Thompson. You don't need your DZ to run a sprinter van, just a driver's license and the ability to cross the border and become FAST approved. If an owner-operator has a down payment for a cargo or sprinter van, they can be rolling with us within two weeks. We can also assist a driver in finding quality late-model equipment to keep truck payments at a manageable level.

The on-demand expedite division is the core of our business. We run primarily between points in Ontario and Quebec, to and from points in the U.S. Great Lakes states, Midwest, and southeast as far down as Texas, Georgia and Alabama. We track our fleet via GPS satellite 24/7-365 and also have live voice, in-cab communication. Our operations team can always talk to our drivers instantaneously via two-way voice systems. Experience has demonstrated that direct two-way conversation between dispatch and our drivers, provides a much higher level of communication above and beyond what GPS satellite positioning displays.

Our tractor division was formed in late 2005 to keep up with customer demand for FTL services and it has grown nicely. We offer a combination of scheduled work and open board load opportunities. We offer good miles and a generous rate per mile.

Our third division is our Logistics department and Air Charter business. When the delivery need time determines that surface expediting is not fast enough, we can move to air charter mode, completely taking full control of the shipment with a detailed ground-air-ground solution.

Thompson's business model works well for owner-operators and is evidenced by their low owner-operator turnover rate. Our longest serving owner-operator has been working with us for over 17 years and many have been with Thompson for almost as long."

Mark adds, "We have a very high safety rating and insurance companies consider us very low-risk. This is largely due to the work of our Fleet Safety and Driver Services team who are the drivers' main point of contact for any problems or concerns. Driver Services support is available to drivers at all times to consult on driver issues and find solutions to problems."

He continues, "We're an owner-operator-oriented company in that we know we need to keep our owner-operators happy in order to be successful. We look for professionalism. We present a load to our owner-operator and if all parameters can be met, we expect the load to get covered. Operations provide the driver with all the support needed for successful delivery. It is important for operations to understand what kind of length of haul, geographic delivery point, drivers' hours of service, etc. that specific owner-operators

are looking to handle and then work with them to tailor load offers that best fit their needs. We don't just say what we have to offer, we find out what an owner-operator needs and then work to come up with an arrangement that works for both of us."

Mark explains how Thompson has addressed border issues to make their owner-operators' jobs easier, "We've always led the way in border security initiatives and processes. We are part of the PIP Program and are FAST approved. We partnered with the Department of Homeland Security to pilot the FAST program and were the prototype carrier for the ACE program. We have customs experts on site in operations 24/7/365 who pre-approve and pre-set loads. Our drivers don't get in line at the bridge until we know that everything has been cleared leaving the drivers to do what they do best...drive."

Mike feels that the industry is showing signs of coming out of the latest down turn. He comments, "Our business is heating up. The average length of haul in our expedite division is increasing to over 425 miles. We're looking forward to the future - everything is full speed ahead which means opportunity for a company like ours."

He continues, "Owner-operators also benefit from the stability that Thompson provides. Even in tough times we have been able to perform profitably. Our company has financial stability behind it with over 25 years of experience. We pay our drivers strong rates per mile because we are able to negotiate fair rates for on-time delivery services."

Mike concludes, "As the economy turns around, we're poised to capitalize. We've been through down turns in the past and each time have sped out of it. This time will be no different."