

CENTRAL PENN BUSINESS JOURNAL

Electronically reprinted from December 5, 2008

Serving Cumberland, Dauphin, Lancaster, Lebanon and York Counties

YORK COUNTY

Traffic-control company flags down niche in road safety

BY PAULA HOLZMAN
paulah@journalpub.com

Mike Doner said he knows few drivers want to encounter one of his employees.

"Nobody is ever happy to see a flagger," said Doner, co-founder and vice president of Traffic Control Services Inc.

But the York Township-based company, which operates as Flagger Force, is popular where it counts — the business has grown by about 40 percent annually since its founding six years ago, Doner said.

The company's clients include construction firms, general contractors, utilities and telephone companies.

Flagger Force employs 400 people and serves 35 counties in Pennsylvania, seven in Maryland and two in Delaware, as well as Washington, D.C., and areas of western New Jersey. The company has taken jobs as far away as Michigan and Tennessee.

Flagger Force also provides work-zone protection, performs job-site safety evaluations and holds traffic-related training and certification programs.

The company is building its first corporate headquarters in Lower Swatara Township, which will enable the business to add 60 field positions and eight office employees, and to expand its coverage area, Doner said. He said he hopes to move in this May.

The facility will allow Flagger Force to own more of its own signage as opposed to renting it, and will give the company expanded space for its training programs.

During the coming year, Doner said the company also plans to open its first dispatch facility in Maryland.



Flagger Force employee Sarah Lawyer, with her face shielded from the cold, directs traffic in Dauphin County. The York Township-based firm employs 400 staff members and serves 35 counties in Pennsylvania, seven in Maryland, two in Delaware, Washington, D.C., and areas of western New Jersey.

PHOTO/AMY SPANGLER

Industry groups have noticed Flagger Force's growth.

"Flagger Force is a large company — it's one of the leading companies (in its field)," said Jason Wagner, the director of policy and government affairs for Associated Pennsylvania Constructors.

Flagger Force is a member of the Harrisburg-based trade association, which represents more than 400 companies connected to road and bridge construction.

Doner said he first noticed the market for traffic-control services while working in the late 1980s for a staffing firm that supplied flaggers.

Companies that specialized in traffic control and hired full-time employees to man work zones began to displace temps as the state tightened its training and signage requirements in the late 1990s, Doner said.

So he came up with the idea of starting a company with his wife, Michele, to fill that growing niche.

Going was slow at first because both of

them had full-time jobs, but the couple was able to build the company to the point that they could go full time in 2006.

The initial need that motivated the Doners is still here today, Wagner said, especially because flagger certification only lasts two years.

"There's a constant need for flaggers and also an ongoing need to train them," he said.

One of the main advantages Flagger Force has is that its employees can take over setting up a safe work zone using its own trucks, signs and equipment, Doner said, allowing their clients to pay attention to other things.

"Our clients want to focus on digging a hole — they don't want to focus on 'Where should my signs be?'" he said.

All of the workers at excavating and paving firm B.R. Kreider & Son Inc. are certified as flaggers, but the East Hempfield Township-based firm would rather have them performing their regular jobs, said Terry Sholansky, the company's safety manager.

FLAGS: Company employs daily inspections, GPS to police itself



PHOTO/SUBMITTED

Flagger Force employees stack equipment at a site in Swatara Township, Dauphin County. They are, from left, Dean Wonsick, McDaniel Purdy, Jo Alfred and Charlena Tafoya. The York Township-based firm was founded six years ago.

"It's easier and most cost efficient for us to hire an outside agency (to be flaggers)," said Sholansky. "We only use our guys in an emergency."

Kreider has hired Flagger Force several times during the past year.

"We like the fact they come with their own truck and they come prepared," she said.

Doner credited his company's success to its quality-assurance program.

Flagger Force has five inspectors who make daily rounds to check on work sites and the company has installed global-positioning systems in all of its 100 trucks to make this possible, he said.

"We don't wait for the client to say, 'This isn't being done correctly.' We police ourselves," Doner said.

It might seem obvious, but toiling alongside motorists who are frustrated at having to slow down — or perhaps just aren't paying attention to the road — can be a dangerous job for flaggers and construction workers alike.

"Companies like Flagger Force who pay attention to safety and can excel in that arena are beneficial to the (construction) industry as a whole," Wagner said. "With the changing environment of construction, having that kind of specialty is very valuable." ■



Traffic Control Services, LLC d/b/a Flagger Force
Toll Free - 1-888-312-3524
www.flaggerforce.com