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I-95 traffic pushes shipper east  
Heidenreich Marine moves from Greenwich to Darien

Compared to the thousands of miles of open ocean its tankers sail around the globe, the journey a Connecticut-based oil shipping company has taken from Greenwich to Darien seems like a puddle jump.

But for the 35-person staff of Heidenreich Marine Inc., the 10-mile transfer of their company headquarters was a serious matter, and fraught with challenges.

Heidenreich Marine workers started settling into their new headquarters in Darien this week after moving from Greenwich, where they had been located for 16 years.

The decision to move was not an easy one, but it was necessitated by the need for more space for future staffing requirements and easier access for employees, said Per Heidenreich, president and founder of the company.

Heidenreich Marine operates a fleet of 37 tankers in the 30,000 to 80,000-ton range, which deliver oil products and crude oil to refineries, distributors, bunker suppliers and power stations around the world. Thirty of the tankers operate in a revenue-sharing pool under Star Tankers Inc.

"We have enjoyed our years in Greenwich, a great location for our business," said Heidenreich. "However, the recent expansion in our business and the need for additional space have provided us with the opportunity to improve the commute for the majority of our employees. We felt that not having to deal with the increasing traffic congestion on the major roads leading into Greenwich will improve the quality of life for our staff."

A Greenwich resident, Heidenreich said the move also was made to help his employees noting that most cannot afford to live in Greenwich. Many live in the less-expensive eastern part of Fairfield County, and the move has shortened their commutes.

"We were looking in Norwalk and Darien. We couldn't move too far east,. We thought Darien was a good compromise," said Heidenreich. He attributed the need for more space to expansion of its accounting, chartering and operations staff.

Heidenreich Marine, commonly known as Heidmar, occupies a 12,000-square-foot space in the Alcone Building at 320 Post Road in Darien. The new building includes a fitness center and bigger conference rooms.

One of the first shipping companies to locate in Fairfield County, Heidmar had been located in a 7,000-square-foot space at 200 Greenwich Ave. for 12.years.

Heidenreich Marine is not the first southwestern Fairfield County business to move east due to traffic congestion, said Lisa Mercurio, director of SACIA, the Business Council of Southwestern Connecticut.

"The trend of companies moving eastward is not unusual. It's important to note that they are not leaving the county or the state," she said. "It just points to the fact that we need an integrated system to alleviate the traffic problem."

Mercurio said moving east away from the heavy congestion is not a long-term solution. SACIA is looking forward to a state-sponsored Transportation Strategy Board meeting on Jan. 11 and how the state legislature will act on recommendations made at the recent state transportation summit.

Heidenreich, 55, founded Heidenreich Marine in 1984. The company is general agent for Star Tankers, founded in January 1998. Star Tankers has grown to 11 participants including five from Greece, four from the United States and one each from Finland and Singapore

"We are the managing agent. With Star Tankers, we have a much bigger market penetration. It results in a much better utilization of their fleets," said Heidenreich, stressing that the shipping firms maintain their autonomy.

Customers include a number of major oil companies including Exxon, British Petroleum, Chevron and Texaco.

Although neither Heidmar nor Star Tankers was involved in the infamous Exxon Valdez incident on the Alaska coast in 1989, Heidenreich said it had a serious effect on the shipping industry.

"Exxon Valdez was devastating. It was the worst nightmare. There were a lot of new regulations as a result, some good and some not so good," said Heidenreich, who deals in a sensitive market affected by international events and an unpredictable economy. "It's a very volatile market, impacted by interest rates and currency. It all comes down to supply and demand. Nobody saw the price of oil going from \$10 to \$35 a barrel."

Heidenreich has emerged as a leader in the oil transportation industry, said James Lawrence, president of Marine Money, a Stamford-based magazine covering the oil transport industry.

"Per has become a revolutionary leader in the consolidation of the business," said Lawrence.

Major oil companies more often are looking to groups such as Star Tankers to carry their oil, said Lawrence, commenting that corporate fleets today carry about 20 percent of their production, compared to about 65 percent in the late 1970s.

"It has a lot to do with these companies getting down to their core businesses like exploration," said Lawrence, estimating that 80 percent of the specialty tanker ship business, including brokers and traders, is headquartered in Fairfield County.

Prior to establishing Heidmar, Heidenreich spent 12 years with the Stolt Nielsen Group, rising to executive vice president of Stolt Nielsen Inc. and president of Stolt Tankers Inc. He also is a co-founder of American Marine Advisors Inc., a New York investment banking firm specializing in shipping.