

# Bowles Rice VIEWS & VISIONS

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FALL/WINTER 2022



**Gary Weleski**  
Weleski Transfer, Inc.

Gary Weleski is President of Weleski Transfer, Inc., a professional, long-distance interstate transportation company headquartered in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He is also a sitting board member of the Atlas World Group Board of Directors. In 1909, Weleski Transfer, Inc. began operation as a one truck, local moving company. In 1963, the company became an agent for Atlas Van Lines and has enjoyed significant growth and developed many partnerships with its corporate and private clients. With locations in Pittsburgh and Cleveland, Weleski provides full-time jobs to 150+ employees.

## Keep On Trucking

The past three years brought on many new challenges in all lines of our business. The pandemic forced us to rethink and react to a new business environment. Since most of our revenues are derived from services that require a very hands-on approach, a work-from-home initiative was not feasible for our transportation drivers and hourly employees. While we continued to operate through the pandemic, as trucking was considered a critical and essential business, it was far from business as usual. Vehicles had to be sanitized daily, employees had to wear PPE, start times were altered, and crew sizes were changed due to restrictions as to the number of employees that were permitted in a commercial vehicle.

this transition was challenging at times, it generated some positivity, as it forced us to fully embrace technology and deviate away from some of the old habits that needed updated and changed.

Additionally, we engaged in virtual company and client meetings through video conferencing tools such as Microsoft Teams and Zoom. Some facets of our service model underwent a remake that have led to new methodology that will become a permanent part of our industry. As an example, the task we historically performed in person is called a pre-move survey. This required a face-to-face meeting between one of our salespersons and our customer. Rather than performing in-person visits, we embraced new virtual

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Our sales, administration, management, and support staff were asked to stay out of our office starting in early March 2020. These personnel were able to convert to an effective work-from-home situation due to a remarkable job by our IT staff to convert to this new, and untested, work environment. Because we are a seasonal business, with most of our annual revenues being generated from May 1 through September 30, we initiated a hybrid work schedule through the summer of 2020 for almost all our G & A staff. Large parts of this hybrid, work-from-home schedule remains intact today. While

platforms to avoid contact. This is now a standard operating procedure and has evolved into a new technology that uses artificial intelligence technology to do virtual surveys.

Naturally, COVID-19 did have some negative consequences early in its cycle. The largest portion of our volume was and is from corporate and government relocation. In early 2020, many corporations, government/GSA and the military radically reduced their number of transfers. Additionally, when tradeshow and conventions cancelled their venues, our transportation division that

hauled these products practically came to a complete halt. This resulted in some intense days of planning to generate revenue and keep employees working. The PPP Program was a true blessing for this company and many of our friends in our industry.

There was a positive and unexpected consequence because of the pandemic and that was demand for our office moving services. Many companies took advantage of the empty offices to reconfigure, renovate, and, in some cases, reduce their commercial footprint. Office furniture was being donated, resold, recycled or, in some cases, the furniture was being discarded. Most of these corporate actions required the use of a professional moving and storage company; hence, that turned out to be a helpful attribute.

Starting in Q2 of 2021, the housing market underwent extraordinary growth resulting in higher-than-normal demand for HHG moving and storage services. Also, pent-up demand for corporate and government relocations began to come to fruition. Demand for our services far outstripped the supply and availability which we were able to offer. This demand stayed strong through the end of Summer 2022. We have seen a slight softening in this demand recently, but we are remaining fully engaged.

Like all companies, we experienced pain as it was related to hiring and retaining experienced employees. Wage inflation was a reality, as we had to ratchet up wages. In some cases, for more skilled positions, 25 to 35 percent wage increases were not uncommon. Our company and our industry continue to face some headwinds as we move forward, not the least of which is our ability to attract new talent. Moving furniture is demanding, physically challenging, and a sometimes-stressful occupation. None of these characteristics make it easy to recruit and retain. We will continue to seek new methodology and/or reinvent some of our practices to face this challenge.

Our company has had a good year, and we remain busy in 2022. Specialized warehousing has been especially impactful for us. Naturally, like all companies, we are anxious going into Q4 and 2023, as inflationary pressures continue to have



negative consequences. We see operating costs starting to flatten but we also anticipate a probable decrease in demand for relocation services as interest rates rise and corporations look to reduce their expenses.

We are reluctant to predict where we will be at this time next year, as the past few years have come with many surprises. As we ruminate about the pandemic, we sometimes must stop and remember what a global challenge we all came through. We are not sure what new challenges could be as demanding—but we are not naïve to not believe that there will be some hurdles in the future. ❖