

business

H&M Bay COO
Walt Messick III

DRIVEN BY FAMILY

H&M BAY CELEBRATES 40 YEARS AS AN AWARD-WINNING LOGISTICS PROVIDER WHERE FAMILIES GROW CAREERS TOGETHER

Written by **Kristen Hampshire**
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Walt Messick III was about 14 years old when he started working in the family business his father founded in 1982 out of their hometown in Federalsburg, MD. On weekends, he'd unload and pack trucks for H&M Bay, a logistics provider for less-than-truckload (LTL) frozen and refrigerated commodities.

"In the early days, we only had a few divisions that we operated, and we were focused on the East Coast," Messick said, relating how his dad, Walter Messick Jr., launched the company in a then "rough and tumble" industry after a career as a long-haul truck driver.

"They were able to see the industry from the ground up, all aspects of it," Messick said of his dad and cofounder Lawrence Hayman.

During the past four decades, H&M Bay has expanded to 10 operational divisions, with locations across the country. Its adoption of sophisticated technology has positioned the LTL company as a forward-thinking player in the market. "We are fully automated, from the dispatch system to our warehouse," said Messick, COO.

A number of longtime employees remember the early days — a testament to H&M Bay's progress and commitment to its people. In essence, H&M Bay is a family business of families. "You see generations and legacy employees who have had opportunities to go elsewhere, but they stay here because we treat them like family," Messick said, sharing how the company promotes from within.

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE PEOPLE

Frank Trego started working at H&M Bay when it first opened, and his wife, Teri, joined the business in 1991. Frank also left the long-haul trucking world for dispatch and logistics. At one time, their son Jason also worked in dispatch. "The whole company is one big family," he said, his wife agreeing. Teri added, "Everyone cares about everyone, and we protect each other."

TJ and Sharon Adams, along with their sons Jay and Tyler, are also part of the H&M Bay family. "At a lot of companies, you're just a number, but it's not like that here. I can talk to the owners; they know my name, and you want to have your family here because there are good opportunities and careers," TJ said. "I have a lot of faith in this company."

In the fast-paced logistics industry, a supportive environment is central to success. And H&M Bay has a track record of growth and recognition. H&M Bay is the Top 3PL & Cold Storage Provider by *Food Logistics* magazine for the 10th consecutive year. And every week, its dispatch team moves 20 million pounds of freight, with more than 7,000 shipments.

"We've tried to stay one step ahead from a technology standpoint," Messick said. "And, we have opened new facilities in the last 10 years to help us serve new markets, including cold-storage facilities that give us an opportunity to not only transfer temperature-controlled freight but also to store it."



Without good people, success is not possible. "We have been fortunate to have some amazing people come through our doors during the last 40 years," Messick said, sharing how every department and division at H&M Bay is an integral piece of the LTL logistics puzzle — from dispatch and warehouse to IT, accounting and leadership. H&M Bay has more than 230 full-time team members and in excess of 600, including part-time employees.

Bringing in family members is one way the company recruits high-performing workers. Take Brett and Joe Ketterman. Joe joined H&M Bay in dispatch, moved into a Trainer and Safety role, Director of Operations for the freight management division, and is now Risk Manager. When an opening cropped up, Joe introduced Brett to the business; he took a position in dispatch, as well.

"I enjoy the opportunity to figure out how to make things work, and with Brett around, we can talk and solve problems together," Joe said, adding that a collegial relationship with the company's leaders makes H&M a comfortable place to grow a career.

"We've been friends with the Messick family for many years, and we went to school with them, so we can talk about old times and laugh like we did back in the day," Brett said.

Close-knit is how Joe describes the team. "You feel like you can go to anyone and they will understand and have dealt with the same issues, and you can lay it out there and work it out together," Brett said.

Jonathan, Mike and Jordan Smith remark on the ability to scale up and take on more responsibilities in the business. "They always promote from within," Mike said, relating how he started in the warehouse, moved into dispatch, was invited to be a supervisor and has been serving as a manager for the last eight years. Meanwhile, John is supervisor of the Seattle division and Jordan has worked four years in the warehouse.

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At the end of the day, H&M Bay and its people are an integral player in the cold-food chain, enabling shelves to be stocked and people's refrigerators to hold essentials.

H&M Bay finds ways to move people into positions where they'll excel. Sharon Adams was working part-time for the schools while her son was growing up, and by the time he was a senior, TJ said the business needed warehouse office help. "It was a great opportunity, and I took it," she said, adding that she came on full-time and never looked back.

Messick adds, "Without good, quality people, you can't have a quality product. While we have always expected a lot from our employees, in return we look out for their well-being and give them room for growth."



NAVIGATING WHAT'S NEXT

The food-logistics industry has evolved significantly since H&M Bay opened — and like many industries, the business is challenged with customer demand for just-in-time delivery in today's age of Amazon Prime and next-day promises. Because H&M Bay operates in the temperature-controlled LTL space, an average truckload leaving one of its facilities will make eight to a dozen stops.

"It's not like we are going from Point A to Point B," Messick explains, adding that weather delays and the labor shortage can throw off even the most thoughtfully planned route. Constant communication, flexibility and an ability to pivot quickly to address obstacles during routes are just some of the important skills H&M Bay team members bring to the business.

At the end of the day, H&M Bay and its people are an integral player in the cold-food chain, enabling shelves to be stocked and people's refrigerators to hold essentials. Over the years, H&M Bay has built an expansive network of truckers and customers that its dedicated employees help service.

Looking ahead, Messick said the company's 40th anniversary, in 2022, will bring more growth, including facility upgrades planned for the next two to five years. "We are looking at larger cold-storage facilities and potential markets we haven't yet dipped our toes into yet, where there might be opportunities for us," he said.

As a company, Messick said H&M Bay takes its responsibility to employees and their families seriously. "We want to continue to grow and make sure we are taking care of our people, because at the end of the day, that's what makes us who we are." **CS**

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