

President of Con-way Retiring from Post After 25 Years in Industry

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Herb Schmidt officially hit the road last Thursday, retiring as the president of Con-way Truckload after 25 years in the industry.

But he'll still have plenty to do.

"I will be spending a lot of time in my branch office," says the spirited trucking leader who worked his way through the ranks at what formerly was CFI Inc.

His branch office, as he jokes, is literally a branch. In the woods. Where he bow hunts deer. And, on a slow day, reads.

That's just the kind of joke that Schmidt, who is quick to laugh and pull practical jokes on co-workers, enjoys.

Hunting is one of his passions that have included, not in any particular order, his work in the trucking industry, motorcycling and exercise.

Schmidt graduated from Memorial High School in Joplin and, in 1978, from Missouri Southern State College with a bachelor's degree in political science. He worked for several years in management at UPS and was recruited to the former CFI Inc. trucking company in 1984. He worked in sales and has led about every department in the company: safety, maintenance, operations.

"I think that's what made him so well-rounded and gave him that foothold to becoming the president," said Stephanie Burgess, who herself has had a career with the company of 23 years and is senior manager of revenue management.

"I think he is an individual that is someone you should seek advice from," she said. She has traveled with Schmidt making sales calls. "He is a great salesperson. In front of customers he is very impressive. I remember how professional, how knowledgeable he is, and he is just so convincing. Whether it was to present a price increase or gain additional business, he had a way of putting on such a positive message. I think it's just a trait he has."

Another of his passions is the industry and his people.

"He's a very generous person," Burgess said. "His employees probably have no idea the extent of his generosity in the community. He's down to earth. He would keep his commercial driver's license current and he would go out at least once a year and take a truck trip and haul freight. And, he wouldn't always take the easy path."

Burgess said that at one time, the company fielded a lot of concerns from drivers about a certain route in New York where they experienced extensive traffic delays and other problems.

"So the next trip he went on, he took a load out there. He came back and told us we need to consider an increase in price to the customers to give an increase in pay to the drivers. That said a lot for him because he put himself in touch with concerns and issues."

"Herb is the kind of boss that would never ask you to do something he hasn't done himself and wouldn't do himself," said Randy Cornell, vice president of maintenance. "He's just that kind of a guy."

Schmidt has kept the trucking company's jobs in Joplin and believes in promoting employees from within the company.

"I don't know a good enough word to describe the appreciation for opportunities he has created," Cornell said.

Schmidt was named president in 2000 and acknowledges the workload is a demanding one, but he still took on leadership roles in the industry. He is former president of the Truckload Carriers Association Safety Council and chairman of the Professional Truck Driving Institute of America.

Schmidt's resume includes a position on the board of directors of Empire District Electric Co. He said he has been invited to participate in many other organizations but that he would not agree to do that if he did not feel he had time to do the job properly. "I've learned to say 'yes' and I've learned to say 'no.' I don't want to do anything half-hearted," Schmidt said.

Schmidt's successor will be Saul Gonzalez, a 21-year veteran with the company.

"His legacy here at Con-way is definitely a good one," said Gonzalez, "and one that is very positive not only for me but the rest of the employees here."

Asked if there will be changes when he takes over, Gonzalez said he plans to follow Schmidt's lead. "I don't like to toot my horn. I'm very open-minded, and I know I'm not the smartest guy on the block. One thing I like to do is listen to employees. They're the ones who do the work and sometimes they have the best ideas."

He said he knows that the company will be dealing with changing technology in the industry, and he will have to assure to leverage that technology to keep Con-way a leader in the marketplace of truckload and short-haul delivery.

Schmidt will be around if Gonzalez needs him. He'll be on call as a consultant for a year — at least by telephone.

Because if he's not hunting or helping kids at The Bridge, he'll be out on one of his motorcycles, which he uses for long-haul trips. He plans a ride next year to Alaska.

Or he'll be exercising, another of his passions.

"I want to wear out, not rust out," the outgoing president said.

Thank you

"I'd like to say thanks to Herb. I really appreciate everything he's done for our company and employees, and I hope I can do the same."

Saul Gonzalez, Herb Schmidt's successor as president of Con-way Truckload