

## Food Service Distributor Responds to Florida Challenge



**Mutual Wholesale Company Vice President of Operations Carl Jones: Operators prefer Crown lift trucks**

**Mutual Wholesale Company has the daily challenge of distributing food service products to the entire state of Florida and a portion of Georgia. The company has responded successfully to the task, growing into the 18th largest food service distributor in the United States. Sales have reached in excess of \$200 million annually.**

Delivering a variety of goods — dry groceries, frozen foods, fresh meat and seafood, dairy products, produce and even cleaning supplies — in a timely and efficient fashion to customers like restaurants, country clubs, hotels, hospitals, schools, prisons and retail grocery stores is no easy job especially when customers can select from more than 8,700 items offered by the wholesaler.

The company's success at serving the Florida market centers around two diversified distribution centers, located in Lakeland and Pompano Beach, and their ability to move frozen, refrigerated and dry products to the customer.

For example, the Lakeland operation houses more than 7,500 total items and receives 125,000 cases on a weekly average. On hand, the company stores more than 465,000 cases of product.

As one would expect, turning product around happens quickly — it has to, emphasizes Mutual Vice President of Operations Carl Jones. “You’re looking basically at about the same number for the in-bound as the out-bound on any given day,” he describes.

The company's Lakeland facility has the ability to move goods from three different areas — 43,000

sq ft for frozen products, 22,000 sq ft for refrigerated storage and 128,000 sq ft for dry storage — remains vital in keeping deliveries on schedule. Products from those areas are shipped or received via trailers featuring compartments for each of those storage components.

“All are designed and set up to work in the same fashion,” said Carl Jones.



**The Crown PE 3000 Series Rider Pallet Trucks with double pallet capabilities are important in moving various products to-and-from staging areas. Above, the double pallet truck works with a Crown reach truck in Mutual's dry storage area.**

"The warehouses are set up with aisles and with slot locations. Everybody works within the aisles and the slot locations for product storage as far as in-bound storage is concerned. The same procedure goes for outbound."

When the orders are placed into the computer, an automatic routing system develops the best sequence for moving the goods to the right truck.

Transporting the various products to and from the 28 different docks and into the appropriate storage space becomes the assignment for Mutual's fleet of Crown lift trucks. Eleven Crown Rider Reach Trucks (RR3540-45), 43 PE 3000 Series Rider Pallet Trucks (double pallets), 17 PE 3000 Series Rider Pallet Trucks, four FCs, four SCs, two SP 3000 Stockpickers, a 30 WRTT walkie stacker, three GPWs and more than 90 Series PTH Hand Pallet trucks are the driving forces at moving goods.

Mutual first selected Crown back in 1985 when the company underwent expansion, changing the facility totally. The company did an extensive study into various manufacturers before selecting Crown.

"Crown represented themselves the best," said Carl Jones, "and we have had an excellent relationship with Crown over the years."

Anywhere from 75 to 100 employees operate the

equipment during a three-shift operation. "The trucks are used from 85 to 90 percent of the time," said Carl Jones.

Batteries are charged after each shift or when the battery interrupt stops an operator, he said.

Outbound materials are shipped at night. Mutual averages shipping 28,000 cases per day or an average of 130 per hour per person. Errors per 1000 cases shipped are less than one percent, notes Carl Jones.

Ceiling heights vary in the facility ranging from 18 ft in the old warehouse to 33 ft in the new freezer. Standard and drive-in rack is utilized in heights ranging from 10 to 21 ft.

"All of our people have become very much sold on the Crown equipment because of its functionality, its operationability, its serviceability to the extent that now whenever I talk about another piece of equipment I get frowned upon heavily by my operators. They do not want to use

anything but a Crown," said Carl Jones.

One of the SP 3000 Series Stockpickers used in the freezer warehouse has an 84-inch wide operator's platform, is wire guided, and works in a 96-inch aisle in their freezer.

"It's designed to be in the high rise area which is developed on six levels of picking and two levels of storing in the freezer area," said Carl Jones about the unusual application.



**Freezer conditions are also prevalent in Mutual's warehouse. An SP 3000 Series Stockpicker (shown above) offers an 84-inch wide operator's platform, allowing for an effective, but different application.**

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