

Nor-Am Cold Storage

Growing with Nor-Am Cold Storage

Nor-Am Cold Storage
801 6th Street SW, Le Mars IA 51031

Tel: 712-548-4433
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Written by: Sasha Orman
Produced by: Seth Lull >>>

Nor-Am Cold Storage CEO Greg Brandt and VP of Operations Scott Albers discuss the brand's strong growth and supportive family culture

In the agriculture industry, keeping your product fresh is paramount. That's where Nor-Am Cold Storage comes in. As a full-service and value-added refrigerated warehouse with facilities in Minnesota, Iowa, Texas, Nebraska, and Missouri, Nor-Am helps its customers throughout the Midwest meet all their 3PL needs from storage and tempering to pack order fulfillment and export services. What's more, Nor-Am does it all while maintaining the kind of unique corporate culture that can only come from a tightly knit family-owned business.

A Culture of Employee Empowerment

Nor-Am Cold Storage Founder and CEO Greg Brandt has a keen vision of the brand he has built, and that includes what makes it stand out.

"One thing that makes us unique is that we are a first-generation family company," he explains. "We are family based, and we think we're a good place for people to work – we like and understand the culture of people that take care of their families."

"We've grown into a larger company but we still have that

family feel to know who's in our warehouse and know our employees," adds Scott Albers, Vice President of Operations at Nor-Am. According to Albers, this family feel comes with an atmosphere of encouragement and agency that takes center stage in Nor-Am's corporate philosophy – a lean philosophy which highlights employee empowerment and promotes participation on every level.

"We've deployed a lean model here and employees have an ownership stake in that process," says Albers, pointing to an idea program implemented to help employees on the shop floor take the lead. "With the idea program, hourly employees can implement low-cost or no-cost ideas that affect safety, quality, delivery, or cost in their areas. If they hit certain milestones in the ideas that are implemented, we buy them lunch and other incentives – plus, they get to work on the things that frustrate them and it shows through to their customers."

Albers adds that it's all part of showing how Nor-Am values its employees. "We give employees the opportunity to own their job and treat the warehouse as if it's their own," he says. "They

understand that they can take pride and ownership in their facility, and I think that shines through in our employees when you meet them, from the general managers to the guys driving the lifts in our warehouse – they take pride in the lifts that they drive, in the warehouse that they keep, and in how they treat our customers, and that's powerful."

Supporting Employees and the Community

At Nor-Am Cold Storage there is a firm belief in employee support, and it's a principle that presents itself in many ways. The business

has been formally recognized by the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve [ESGR] as a company that offers its support to employees in the national guard and military reserve. Nor-Am also sponsors several scholarships at a local trade school, and is a strong advocate of its own employees furthering their education as well.

"We continually try to train them up," says Brandt, noting that Nor-Am routinely sends employees to annual classes offered through the World Food Logistics Organization (WFLO) and the Heartland chapter of the International Association of Refrigerated Warehouses (IARW).



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our customer needs are and how what they do has an effect on our customer. I think that's very important."

A Future of Growth and Partnerships

All of that education is being put to good use at a rapidly growing business. Already in the past year Nor-Am completed a large expansion of its facility in Schuyler, Nebraska, increasing its capacity by 55 percent and upgrading its efficiency through features like timer-activated LED lights. Even so, there is still a lot of growing and expansion left to do in a number of different ways.

"We are always looking to grow, either by adding in one of our current locations or possibly buying an existing company," says Brandt. "It just depends on the market and the economy."

Nor-Am is also growing its business through other added value features that the business has to offer its customers. "From the warehouse side, what helps differentiate ourselves from standalone public refrigerated warehouse companies would be our Pro-Visions Packing side of our business," says Albers. "We have

"With some of the classes they have, we feel that our employees can really bring back value to our service and to our customers, whether it's through increased safety or food safety or even on the IT side or building layout," says Brandt. "We take that industry education of our employees pretty seriously and we participate on a fairly active level. We put a lot of opportunities in front of our employees to help them to not only learn their job, but also to understand their industry and then hopefully be more aware of what



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custom boxing and repackaging of beef, pork, and poultry, and we do a lot of tempering. We also custom slice both meats and cheeses, and custom produce sandwiches for customers for a line we're getting involved in – really, it's a custom-type shop for any additional services that our customers may need, and that's really been a growing area for us."

"We're trying to grow through those venues, too," says Brandt, adding that this move not only

helps to separate Nor-Am Cold Storage from other cold storage facilities that trade solely in receiving and shipping product, but helps Nor-Am forge a deeper partnership with its customers. "It keeps us in tune with our protein suppliers, the beef poultry and pork guys," he says. "With their industries we look at ourselves as an extension of what they're doing."

The Nor-Am Difference

There are certainly many features

that set Nor-Am Cold Storage apart, but in the end it all comes down to a couple of key factors: customer service and integrity. "I think what we do is we have a high level of customer service," says Brandt. "We are very active within our warehouses, seeing what's going on every day, and that's important. We have always had a simplified rate structure that's easy to understand, and we do what we say we're going to do."

STATISTICS



INDUSTRY:

Company name Public Refrigerated Warehousing, Pro-Visions Packing serves the Custom Packing/Tempering sector, Artesian Ice, manufactures and sells packaged Ice.

FOUNDED:

1998

HEADQUARTERS:

Le Mars, Iowa

KEY PEOPLE/TITLES:

- Greg Brandt, President and CEO
- Janna Brandt, CFO
- Scott Albers, Vice President of Operations,
- Dave Waller, National Warehouse Sales,
- Mike Francis Pro-Visions Packing Sales.

EMPLOYEES:

215

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