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Old Vitamin Plant Now Home to Trucking Company

By Claudia Elliott

Young's Commercial Transfer trucks are a familiar sight throughout California and Arizona — and along Olive Avenue in Porterville, where the company has been located for more than 60 years.

Perhaps the largest agriculture transport firm in the state, Young's is in the process of moving to new headquarters at the former National Vitamin plant near the Porterville Airport.

The 16-acre site has more than 100,000 square feet of space in three buildings along Scranton Avenue west of Highway 65. It has convenient access to Highways 190 and 65.

CEO Scott Daniel said the move should be complete in about 45 days when office space renovations are finished. Redesign of the complex has been under the direction of Porterville architect Dennis Townsend. The general contractor is Gary Day of Dayco, also of Porterville.

With about 135 trucks, Young's specializes in hauling citrus and tomatoes and employs between 100 and 300 people depending upon the season, in addition to keeping another group of as many as 150 owner-operators busy.

The Scranton Avenue facility has shop space for truck and trailer maintenance as well as parking — something that has been getting tight at the current location, Daniel said.

Springville resident Larry Young was two years old when his father, who had owned the business since 1935, moved it to its current location at Olive and Lotas on Porterville's west side. A predecessor firm, Commercial Transfer, dates from the horse-and-buggy days in Porterville and Lindsay.



Larry Young, left, and Scott Daniel of Young's Commercial Transfer at the company's new facility near the Porterville Airport.

“It was country then,” he recalls of the West Olive area. “There were orchards and a chicken farm in the area and we were quite a ways out.”

As Porterville has grown, with both commercial and residential development, it has become harder and harder for Young's to operate at the location.

“The business was on the outskirts of town and now it's in the heart of the city,” Daniel said.

Young's Commercial Transfer remains a family business. Daniel is married to Stacey, one of Larry and Jody Young's three daughters. Their daughter Cynthia and her husband, James Gong, also work for the company.

Young took over the business when he was just 22 years old after his father died in a tragic accident. He's 65 now and officially “retired,” but he's been following progress on the renovation of the new complex.

“After more than 40 years, you think it might be time to do something else,” he said with a smile.

Work to prepare the Scranton Avenue facility for the company's use has been underway for a number of months. Thieves had stolen copper wire, making it necessary to replace electrical systems and the air-conditioning units were full of vitamin dust. Even now, the interior of the central building — which is still being remodeled — smells like vitamins.

The complex was built originally for Hiller Aviation, a helicopter manufacturing company. National Vitamin Company acquired the property after Hiller closed in the 1970s, operating until 2006 when the manufacturing company closed its Porterville facility and moved to Arizona, citing the high cost of doing business in California as a reason.

A number of companies have looked at the complex which has remained vacant since that time, according to Linda Wammack, development associate with the city of Porterville. Although surrounded by orange groves, the property is within the city limits and is near the city's sports complex and off road vehicle park in the airport area.

“We are excited to see the building going back into use by an active business,” Wammack said. “And we're especially excited that Larry — as his business continues to grow — has been able to find space within our community.”

Once the move is complete, Young plans to develop the property at Olive and Lotas, although specific uses have not been determined.

The new site offers the company some elbow room for growth and Daniel said they are optimistic about future prospects for Young's Commercial Transfer despite the economy.

“We see continued growth,” he said. “Everybody has to eat, so even in a recession there will be tomatoes and oranges to move.”

Although recently lower fuel prices have eased the pain, he conceded that 2008 was a tough year.

“It's been tough for truckers,” he said. “First fuel prices were high, then the economy slowed down.”

Additionally, he noted, California's political climate makes it tough for trucking.

“The California Air Resources Board is trying to lead the nation and wants to require nothing less than seven or eight-year-old trucks on the road,” he said. “There are stringent requirements and the industry is constantly changing.”

Balancing tomatoes and citrus has helped Young's Commercial Transfer prosper, Daniel said.

The company is busy in the summer, hauling cannery tomatoes for J.G. Boswell and Hunt's—in the neighborhood of 80,000 loads of tomatoes are delivered from the fields to processing plants where they become diced tomatoes, tomato paste or catsup.

When the tomato season ends, the trucks are refitted to haul citrus bins and carry all of Sunkist's lemons and oranges in California and Arizona from fields to packing houses and juice plants.

“With all of the pressures facing the industry, we feel real fortunate to be operating in this market sector,” Daniel said.

And with space to grow at its new location, Young's Commercial Transport will continue to call Porterville home.