

BUSINESS: A6

Female-owned
trucking firms
on the rise



NEIGHBORS: C1

Mechanical hobby
fits Pasadena
teen to a T



Maryland Gazette

By, for and about the people of northern Anne Arundel County

America's
oldest newspaper:
Founded 1727

A CAPITAL-GAZETTE NEWSPAPER

SATURDAY, JUNE 17, 2006

50 CENTS

Business

BURNING RUBBER

Female-owned trucking firms on the rise

BY KATIE ARCIERI
STAFF WRITER

Joni Suller was just a girl who needed a break.

Stuck in a dead-end job as a customer service agent for Bell Atlantic in the 1990s, she longed for something more.

That changed after her brother Rick, owner of a company known as Brunner's Delivery Service, encouraged her to jump into the trucking business.

Not afraid to start from scratch, Ms. Suller took the plunge by quitting her job, buying a van and making a go of it in 1997.

"I was like OK, let me give it a try," the Pasadena resident said.

That initial try — followed by the years of obstacles she faced in a historically male-dominated industry — has led to a thriving company called Eagle Express, a trucking firm expected to rake in \$4 million this year.

The firm relocated last month from Baltimore County to a larger, 40,000-square-foot building at 7449 Shipley Ave. in Harmans.

That move added to a growing number of women-owned trucking transportation firms in Anne Arundel. According to the county's Directory of Minority & Woman-Owned Businesses, there are at least five other women-owned firms that provide trucking services



By Andy Carruthers — Maryland Gazette

Joni Suller moved Eagle Express — a trucking firm specializing in retail distribution — from Baltimore County to a 40,000-square-foot location in Harmans last month. The firm is adding to a growing number of women-owned trucking transportation firms in Anne Arundel County.

in the county.

Jas Trucking Inc. is based in Lothian, and there's Jones of Annapolis Inc. on Generals Highway. Providing hauling and dump truck transportation, K L Phillips Trucking LLC is in Pasadena. Mikelly Enterprises Inc., which specializes in local freight trucking, is on Veterans Highway in Millersville, and in Croft-

on, ProMoving USA provides overnight trucking services, according to the directory.

Anne Ferro, president of the Maryland Motor Truck Association, didn't have exact figures but said more women have gotten into the trucking business over the past 10 years.

"Women are certainly one of the target groups for get-

ting into the industry," she said. "It's great independence, to be your own boss when you're inside that cab."

But getting trucking businesses off the ground is no easy task, said Kay Phillips, owner of K L Phillips Trucking. Ms. Phillips said she's worked hard to gain respect

(See TRUCKS, Page A7)

Business

TRUCKS

(Continued from Page A6)

in trucking circles, especially when she was just a newcomer trying to make a name for herself.

"I wasn't out there driving with them before I started a company and they thought I hadn't paid my dues," she said. "You work a little harder, work a little more vigorous, as a woman."

Ms. Suller knows what hard work means. In 1997, she was set to run

freight for a company that promised her work. After getting the runaround for a month, the deal collapsed but that didn't stop her from pushing forward. She started knocking on the doors of larger trucking firms, asking for any extra work. The response wasn't exactly positive.

"They said, 'Oh, this little girl and this van want to carry freight,'" Ms. Suller said.

Finally though, Ms. Suller landed a job delivering medical products to Virginia. She was making crumbs, but at least it was work.

By hauling medical products in a 16-foot truck, Eagle Express grossed \$18,000 in the first nine months of 1997. Then, Ms. Suller caught her big break, and was hired to deliver retail products for 60 Fashion Bug stores in Maryland. In the last quarter of 1997, her company made \$192,000, she said.

James Rosa, director of transportation for Charming Shoppes, the parent company of Fashion Bug, soon expanded Ms. Suller's duties to deliver to stores in Virginia, Delaware and Pennsylvania. Mr. Rosa called Ms. Suller a "unique individual" for

whom he has tremendous respect because she's built a business in a male-dominated industry.

"I certainly have a lot of personal respect for her," he said. "She would not have gotten past me if she could not have done this."

Soon, Eagle Express began delivering for Modell's Sporting Goods, Nine West and Phillips-Van Heusen, further carving out its niche as a retail distribution carrier. And the company's 18,000-square-foot space in Baltimore County was no longer adequate to handle the growing business.

Last year, county economic development officials helped Ms. Suller find the vacant Harmans location that fit her needs. Eagle Express moved in last month, transferring 35 employees to Anne Arundel.

Although she has sacrificed time with her family to build the business, Ms. Suller said it will ultimately benefit them in the end.

"I want my kids to just keep this going and make more of what I have," she said.

—————
karcieri@mdgazette.com