



Logistics teams compete on public stage

Joe Jasinski August 6, 2010

Inside a 50,000-square-foot warehouse on Indianapolis' north side, sporadic sounds of cheering and wacky commotion echo at deafening levels.

Air horns, homemade noisemakers (water bottles with beaded necklaces inside), a disc jockey and, of course, cow bells, create an atmosphere akin to an athletic arena filled to capacity.

Believe it or not, this is the world of logistics. Or at least logistics at the inaugural Indianapolis LogistXGames

About 400 people convened at a vacant 96th Street distribution center Thursday for a four-event competition pitting teams comprised of logistics and distribution employees from different companies against one another. Each team vied for the title of industry supremacy in the region.

Teams of employees from nine companies, including Plainfield-based MD Logistics, UPS, Subaru and Amazon competed in contests designed to test packaging-and-handling expertise. In the "Box Put" event, for instance, a box with three donated bottles of Brown Forman alcohol products inside is packaged, heaved and judged for distance and breakability.

After three hours of boxing, taping, stacking, storing and throwing, Belkin International Inc.'s Plainfield warehouse team hoisted the Golden Pallet—the 2-foot-by-2-foot "trophy" that has become the event's signature prize.

Belkin supporters Cheri House and Tara Bolen crafted poster signs reading, "Forget the rest, Belkin Connection is the best," and, "Belkin Rocks."

LogistXGames, which expanded into Indianapolis and Cincinnati this year after three years of taking place solely in Louisville, is the brainchild of Kevin Grove, senior vice president and partner for Los Angeles-based CB Richard Ellis' Louisville office. It's free for companies to participate in, and aims to build camaraderie, allow for companies to interact with one another, and provide a forum for competition, Grove said.

Central Indiana has 90,000 employees in the transportation, distribution and logistics industry, making Indianapolis a no-brainer as a LogistXGames host, said event chair Gregg Durham, a vice president for Indianapolis-based distribution service Bastian Material Handling LLC.

"Indianapolis is a huge logistics hub," said Durham "This is a way for us to give back to our clients. Plus, it's just a fun game."

And it's an event that many companies and community groups have eagerly supported, Durham added. ProLogis, a Denver-based industrial real estate owner, donated money and use of its warehouse. Milwaukee-based dock manufacturer Rite Hite and Bastian supplied volunteers. Economic development group Greater Louisville Inc. has been heavily involved in past events.

Yet more apparent than professional enthusiasm was that of Thursday's event participants.

Team Reebok members, hailing from the company's distribution facility in Indianapolis, even sported matching sneakers, fit with electrifying neon green soles.

"It's a break from the norm," said "Neon" Deon Adams, 43, of Reebok, who got his nickname while playing wide receiver for Lindbloom Tech High School in Chicago. "It gives you time to let your hair down, meet people from other companies and interact."

Subaru brought close to 40 people from its distribution center in Whitestown, the largest group present (Dominant chant: "SU-BA-RU! SU-BA-RU!"). Amazon supporters from Whitestown emphatically hoisted their warehouse warriors onto their shoulders, while MD Logistics donned bandanas and eye black.

"It shows that we can work and we like to have fun," said MD Logistics team captain Kevin Deaton, 47. "At the end of the day, we all like to have fun, but we do the job correct."

Given company responsiveness in the three initial cities, Grove said he's now looking into immediate expansion. He said he hopes to hold LogistXGames in 12 cities by next year, and that St. Louis, Detroit, Memphis, Atlanta and Chicago have expressed interest in hosting.

"If [Grove] says something, it'll get done," said event volunteer Aaron Kusel, an account representative for Louisville-based packaging manufacturer Premier Packaging.

The logistics industry is expected to grow as well.

The \$1 trillion U.S. transportation, distribution and logistics industry is expected to grow 65 percent in

the next 10 years, which bodes well for the Hoosier state. More than 150 million people live within 500 miles of Indiana, and no state has more total interstates passing through it.

For LogistXGames, the season finale is forthcoming.

The three top teams from Indianapolis (Belkin, Subaru and Reebok), Cincinnati and Louisville will compete in the "Global LogistXGames" to crown a communal champion on September 16.

"Who knows?" said Mitch Smith, vice president at Bastian in Cincinnati, who agreed to co-chair the Cincinnati and Indianapolis events after watching last year's Louisville events as a spectator. "If the event keeps expanding, maybe we can work out a deal with ESPN."