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MATT FATKA, CEO, HIGHWAY SIGNING INC.



Life is a Highway

MATT FATKA DIVERSIFIES CONSTRUCTION SUPPLIER

BY DWAIN HEBDA | PHOTOGRAPHY BY DEBRA KAPLAN

Although he's quick to share the credit with his team of employees, the simple fact is Highway Signing Inc. wouldn't be where it is without the grit and leadership of its CEO, Matt Fatka. Starting with the firm in his early 20s, Fatka worked his way up the company ladder to owner of the firm in 2007, weathering numerous challenges all along the way.

Today, with a highly diversified roster of services, an experienced and committed team of employees and the promise of millions in forthcoming federal infrastructure spending, the company's fortunes have never looked more promising.

"When we purchased the company, all they did was mainly traffic control," Fatka said. "We are still the largest supplier of concrete barrier rail in Nebraska. But we also do temporary traffic signals, striping, rumble strips. Pretty much, if it's anything in a construction zone, we now supply it."

The company performs its work throughout a regional footprint that has included work in Kansas, South Dakota, northwest Missouri, Iowa and, with a few projects in Kentucky and Indiana as well. About 90% of the company jobs, however, are in Nebraska and all are managed from Highway Signing's Council Bluffs headquarters.

Broadening Services

Fatka's decision to diversify the company's services, which took considerable investment in equipment and training, has made the 50-employee company an anomaly in an industry known for service silos where competitors focus on just one or two specialties. Offering a one-stop suite of solutions, by contrast, is paying off big for Highway Signing.

"Investing in durable striping, like what the state of Nebraska uses, and in a rumble strip trimmer has given us a huge boost providing one big package of services for everybody," he said. "It's landing us more jobs and generating more revenue just by diversifying what our company offers."

"We're putting a lot back into the company and into our people. As a result, we've doubled revenue,

we've doubled personnel and it positions us as the leading company in Nebraska that provides a full package for everything."

Young Achiever

Fatka was just 23 years old when Highway Signing bought the assets of Omaha-based Hi-Way Barricades and put him in the role of general manager. Within five years, he'd risen to vice president with ownership stock.

Under Fatka's leadership, Highway Signing has performed and then some. In 2019, the year he became president and majority shareholder, Fatka led the firm to 42% year over year growth. Despite COVID-19 challenges, he did even better during 2020, the same year he bought up the outstanding ownership shares.

Throughout this journey, Fatka has been known for an engaging leadership style and a seemingly bottomless appetite for learning. These qualities enabled him to form a vision for the future and hire staff to match that vision, a strategy that has withstood changes in the economy and encroachment by competitors.

"The competitive landscape has changed," he said. "There's a lot of companies always wanting to move in on your area. We've continued to be successful because of the relationships we've built and maintained through the years. Relationships are everything in this business, as is your performance on the job. If you can't perform, talk is cheap."

"The other thing I stress all the time is it's not me, it's our team. It's our guys in the field that show up every day, the guys working 12, 14, 16 hours a day. It's our team in the office. It's everyone we have here. They're all part of the success we've had, and I want to make sure all of them get the credit that they deserve for everything that we've done."

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