

Clinton's Gulf Relay providing essential pandemic services

By Sherry Lucas

Clinton-based cargo and freight company Gulf Relay provides an essential service on the front lines and highways — never more than now, during the COVID-19 pandemic that has locked down communities and citizenry across the country. While gatherings are on hold and many businesses are temporarily shuttered, truck drivers are vital in getting goods where they need to be, to keep people fed, safe and stocked up on basic supplies.

“Getting essential goods to consumers and distributors, right now, is a pretty key component to making sure everybody has food and water,” said Blanks Baldwin, Gulf Relay chief operations officer.

Also crucial in the delivery chain are masks and hand sanitizer, to keep people safe and slow the disease's spread.

“Things like that are really pressing right now. That, to me, is one of the main important parts of what we do, just making sure we keep those wheels running so we can make the deliveries and get the goods into consumers' hands.”

Gulf Relay, now marking ten years in operation, has 226 trucks and primarily serves the Southeast and Midwest, but deals in all forty-eight contiguous states.



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“We go as far west as California and as far northeast as New York. We go up into Washington State and down into Florida, so we cover it all,” Baldwin said. “We may not deliver in every state, but we pass through them all.”

Gulf Relay is powered by a strong, intelligent crew, Baldwin said — a main strength that keeps things moving, even as much in the country has nearly ground to a halt. Senior leadership and middle management did a good job forecasting and staying on

top of the rapid changes that came with pandemic-related adjustments, he said.

“This is something we've never seen in the transportation industry... We've had to adapt a lot, and really be more willing to just change the way we had to structure a few things,” said Baldwin. “We usually work in a tight-quartered environment. We've had to scatter people, to let them work from home during the shelter-in-place order. It's been a good time for us to learn, and to be able to take this and

use it for future reference.”

Gulf Relay's drivership is another key company component, and Baldwin praised the 210 hard-working drivers who keep things moving.

“Our drivers have been stronger than ever. They're our front line out there, and they're at the most risk,” interacting with dock workers, moving goods into COVID-19 hot spots such as southern Louisiana and New York and more. “A lot of kudos to those guys working through this, and who volunteered to keep working through this in order to help our nation.”

“We have been very fortunate, knock on wood,” said Baldwin. “We've only had one [confirmed COVID-19] case in our drivers, although a few had some scares,” he said, from being around people who'd tested positive, and then going through a fourteen-day quarantine. The company has had no cases among office workers.

Gulf Relay's current hauls include a lot of food and beverages, corrugated and plastic; they also ship a lot for Georgia Pacific. On the other hand, equipment such as lawn mowers that were a good part of its business in previous years “are not slinging off the shelves like they usually are,” Baldwin said. A diversified customer network, not heavily reliant in one particular segment, has helped Gulf Relay

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