



Stoughton Trailers, LLC *Special Award - Pulling for Success*

In 1961, fresh out of engineering school at the UW-Madison, Don Wahlin bought a trailer company out of bankruptcy and renamed it Stoughton Truck Body. Then he hired his first employee. Over the next decade, the company and its product line expanded. New materials and designs were developed and incorporated into the growing variety of trucks and trailers the company produced. A second manufacturing plant was built and then a third. In 1973, the company name was changed to Stoughton Trailers, and the business kept growing. Eventually there were 7 plants and 1,600 employees.

And then it almost all came to an end. Trucking is one of the lynchpins of the economy, so the Great Recession that began in 2008 brought the company to its knees: in a two-year period, Stoughton Trailers had to cut its workforce to 250 and close several of its plants. But Don Wahlin wasn't one to give up. By now, three of his eight children were holding management and leadership positions in the company. They invested in their remaining employees, partnered with area tech colleges, provided management training, and built up their sales network to be stronger and more nimble. Little by little, as the economy improved, the business began to grow and thrive again.

Today, Stoughton Trailers is the fifth largest semitrailer manufacturer. More than **150,000 Stoughton Trailers** travel the highways of the United States and Canada every day. Don continues to serve as the CEO of STI Holdings, the parent company, and son Bob Wahlin is President and CEO of Stoughton Trailers. Seven of the second generation Wahlins play a part in the family company, and the 21 members of the third generation, most of whom are still in school, are encouraged to consider careers in the family business.

From the beginning, Don Wahlin believed that good people are the key to a good business. Employees at Stoughton Trailers are treated like family. The company provides an attractive benefits package and even has an in-house medical clinic for workers and their families. Stoughton Trailers is Stoughton's largest employer and the largest manufacturing employer in Dane County. Supporting the community is a high priority. The 501(c)3 Wahlin Foundation was established to provide grants and scholarships for the communities where its facilities are located. To date, it has invested more **2.5 million dollars** for these purposes.

When Don Wahlin started his company in 1961, there were several dozen trailer manufacturers competing for business. Few have survived. With the help of dedicated, well-trained employees, Stoughton Trailers has built a reputation for durable trailers that hold their value. From the early days of ice cream and beer delivery trucks, to semis, flatbeds, refrigerated, and intermodal containers, Stoughton Trailers stands the test of time.

The judges were impressed by the company's resiliency and perseverance during the recession, creation of a well-funded foundation, dedication to its employees, and unwavering core values.

The judges named this Special Award "Pulling for Success" and it goes to Stoughton Trailers, LLC, of Stoughton.

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