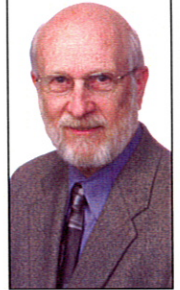


Material Handling

MANAGEMENT

Witt's End



Material Handling, Logistics: Keys to Success

There's a treasure buried in America. Worth countless billions, so the story goes. A group of material handling and logistics professionals in Columbus, Ohio, think they've the key—two keys really—to unlock the treasure chest. Of course, first, they have to find the treasure and dig it up.

Toward that end, they've designed a roadmap that leads to the treasure chest. And, they have the crew in place to do the digging. The treasure is buried in the middle of the state, which happens to be within a day's drive of about 62% of the U.S. population. The keys that will unlock the treasure chest are material handling and logistics.

This is a story of how, with the right vision and faith in your convictions, spending a bit of money up front on a risky treasure hunt can earn a profit in the long run. There's a bit of the *Field of Dreams* philosophy in play, as well. If you build it—even a distribution center with 1.6 million square feet—somebody will fill it.

Development Counsellors International was recruiting journalists to venture into unknown territory—Columbus. We'd get a first-hand look at why and how the region is attracting some of the larger logistics projects in the country. It's where treasure is rumored to be buried. Did I want to go? You bet!

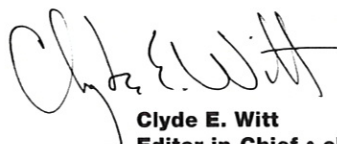
The Columbus Region Logistics Council, headed by John Ness, president, ODW Logistics, has generated a long list of projects, rolled into what it calls the Advanced Logistics Strategic Roadmap. A few messages from the trip: The future looks bright ahead if we hang in there; Columbus is *the* place to be if you're in the distribution business; logistics is about moving lots of stuff, while material handling is about what to do with that stuff before, during and after you move it.

The treasure map looks more like a puzzle. It's a complicated picture that only makes sense when you see all the pieces in their proper positions. It depicts how management's new challenge will not only be to pay attention to what's going on inside the building, it has to expand its view to include things like where to locate that building in the first place. Of major importance is where to get the employees to work inside that building. With the whole picture before you, finding the treasure seems doable.

Here's one example of what the folks in Columbus are doing: Within and around the former Strategic Air Command base, Rickenbacker Field, endless distribution centers are already in place, and more are being built. Some buildings are literally on the runway, which is long enough to handle the Space Shuttle, by the way. Freight will move directly from the bellies of the airplanes into waiting trucks, bypassing the warehouse.

We didn't actually see the rumored treasure. We did get a glimpse, however, of the future, and in some instances, that's just as exciting. Without trying very hard, our hosts Ness; Mike Gardner, chief development officer, Exel; the Chamber of Commerce; Ben Ritchey, vice president transportation market sector, Battelle; and many others, made believers out of us. The treasure might just be buried in Columbus.

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