



Randy Ward started Associated Freight Brokers, a Yakima-based transportation brokerage firm, in 1988. The business, located off South 24th Avenue, helps deliver refrigerated fruit and produce around the country. At right, Operations Manager Wendy Olson helps keep the business running smoothly on a daily basis.

# Logistics Company Has Been Solving Problems For 30 Years

## Associated Freight Brokers Facilitates Shipping Of Fruit And Produce To 48 States

By Dave Leder

Randy Ward has been in the transportation logistics business for 40 years, so he's seen a thing or two.

As he will tell you, the industry is nothing like it was back in 1978, when he started facilitating fruit and produce deliveries to Montana.

"Back then, we would have to work 15-hour days during cherry season because we needed to be at the warehouse to answer questions when the truckers showed up," said Ward, who started Yakima-based Associated Freight Brokers in 1988.

"Nowadays, we don't need to be around as much because of all the new technology. But we still have to be available all the time. That's just



part of the job, and our staff knows it."

Ward, 74, has stepped away from the day-to-day operations, but he still talks to Operations Manager Wendy Olson and the rest of the team on a daily basis.

Olson has been with the company since 2011, though Ward said she's really proven her worth over the past two years since his former operations manager of 12 years departed.

"Wendy has really taken on a leadership role, and that has allowed me to step away a little bit," Ward said. "She has helped me become more trusting and reliant on other people, and I think that has also helped our business."

Associated Freight Brokers serves clients in 48 states, coordinating the delivery of refrigerated fruit and produce around the country. The company also handles some frozen food accounts, but the bulk of its clients are in agriculture.

Ward's staff works seven days a week with shippers, receivers, carriers and drivers to ensure their clients' refrigerated products get where they need to be.

"We're basically a logistics department for fruit companies," said Ward, a Yakima Valley resident since 1969. "We assemble information and our clients' needs and then we disseminate it."

Ward can't say enough about his team of six employees, who keep the business running smoothly day in and day out. He also has been pleased with their loyalty.

Ramona Bishop has been working in the business office for 13 years, while Sandy Hatch

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# Sunwest Limos Offering Holiday Light Tours For 21st Year

By Molly Allen

If you've always dreamed of riding in a limousine but have never had the opportunity, now is your chance.

Sunwest Limousine in Yakima kicked off its annual Christmas Light Tours on Nov. 30 with a toy donation event to collect items for Toys For Tots and The Salvation Army. Nightly light tours are running now through Sunday, Dec. 23.

"We do this every year," said Steve Walsh, owner of Sunwest. "It's fun for the community and brings families together."

The company has been hosting the Christmas Light Tours every holiday season since 1997. Each year, the company partners with a new local business to serve as the home base for the evening tours.

Last year, Sunwest partnered with Famous Dave's, and this year, tours will begin at Apple Tree Golf Course.

"It has become a community tradition at this point," said Joan Walsh, Steve's sister, who runs the office and marketing for Sunwest. "We are a longtime Valley family, and this is one of the things we love to do every year."

Steve and Joan Walsh are two of seven siblings who grew up in the Yakima Valley. Both graduated from Davis High School in 1975.

"We love that we get to celebrate with local families and give back to the community," Joan said.

Starting Dec. 1, the entire Sunwest limo fleet, including the Hummer limo and Hollywood party



It's the holiday season, which means it's the perfect time to take a ride in a limousine to see all of the Christmas lights around the Valley. Sunwest Limos in Yakima has been hosting the tours since 1997. This year's tours start at Apple Tree Golf Course in West Valley.

bus, has been providing tours seven days a week.

Tickets must be purchased in advance for \$19 per person, with a minimum of six people joining your group. Tours begin at 5 p.m. at Apple Tree, 8804 Occidental Road.

The one-hour tour drives a loop in the Apple Tree neighborhood to view the most spectacular Christmas light displays in the area.

"It makes for an affordable family activity, and it's something people don't generally get to experience," Steve said. "It brings joy to the community during the holiday season."

Sunwest also offers private limo tours throughout the holiday season so people can take a longer tour

and view the Christmas lights with a private group. This time of year, rides to and from holiday parties are also popular.

Throughout its 21 years, the company has kept a running list of locations with great Christmas light displays, but the staff also receives calls to let them know of the truly spectacular displays.

"We always encourage people to get their lights up early for everyone to enjoy," Joan said. "And, if someone has a house to share, we love to hear about it."

To schedule a tour or learn more about the tours, call 509-453-5466.

## Associated Freight

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has been there nine. Salesman Josh Borden has been on board since 2014 and sales assistant Lola Leon started in 2015. Sales assistant Colton Hatch rounds out the team.

"Our staff is awesome," Ward said. "They're the ones who keep this thing going, not me."

Ward said he would like to add as many as two more employees, but just like in many other fields right now, finding qualified applicants has been difficult.

He admits that the transportation logistics business can be challenging, but natural problem solvers with positive attitudes will be rewarded.

"This business isn't for everyone. It kind of follows you around, even on the weekends," he said. "But our

clients expect us to be available when they need us, so that's what we do. For us, it's all about being successful and doing whatever it takes to get the job done right."

In many ways, Ward can't believe it's been 30 years since he started Associated Freight Brokers.

He's been involved in the transportation business since 1975, when he started buying, selling and hauling produce from the Yakima Valley to western Montana. After a few years of doing that, he committed himself strictly to the logistics side.

He's been doing it ever since, and all of a sudden, Ward's company is 30 years old.

"I always expected this business to grow and prosper," he said. "I was hoping it would last as long as I do, and I'm happy it has done that. We must be doing something right."

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