

Gov. Walker: Announces 2018 Governor's Export Achievement Award winners

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Contact: Amy Hasenberg, (608) 266-2839

Gehl Foods, Carnivore Meat Co., Optimum Vehicle Logistics honored for exporting excellence

MILWAUKEE - Governor Scott Walker today presented Carnivore Meat Co. of Green Bay, Gehl Foods of Germantown and Optimum Vehicle Logistics of Milwaukee with the 2018 Governor's Export Achievement Award in recognition of their success in global business development.

"Wisconsin exports increased by 6.1% in 2017 and are off to a strong start again this year due in large part to the efforts of companies like these, which have developed strategies for reaching new international markets," said Governor Walker. "Congratulations to this year's winners for their success in exporting. They are each helping grow Wisconsin's economy."

The awards, which were presented at the 54th Annual Wisconsin International Trade Conference in Milwaukee, honor businesses that have achieved significant growth or implemented innovative strategies in exporting. Nominees were evaluated on measurable export growth, innovation and contributions to the state's overall economy, and trade development.

2018 Governor's Export Achievement Award Winners:

Carnivore Meat Co. - Founded in 2012, Carnivore is one of the fastest-growth contenders globally in the pet food industry, specializing in the raw food category. The company's flagship consumer brands, Vital Essentials and Vital Cat, make up the fourth largest brand in this niche with frozen and freeze-dried entrees, treats and snacks for dogs and cats. The company, which began exporting in 2015, experienced a 54 percent increase in international sales from 2016 to 2017, and expects that to increase by more than 600 percent in 2018.

"We've been extremely blessed to have experienced such tremendous growth both domestically and internationally," said Lanny Viegut, CEO and owner of Carnivore Meat Company. "We exceeded expectations last year and are making significant investments across the entire organization in anticipation of a 50 percent increase in our workforce, just to keep up to demand. We truly appreciate the recognition bestowed upon us with the Governor's Export Achievement Award and the support we've received from the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation."

Gehl Foods - Founded more than a century ago in Milwaukee, Gehl Foods is an aseptic manufacturer that produces fresh-tasting, shelf-stable dairy products. The company has integrated business units covering contract manufacturing, retail brands, private-label brands, food service, convenience store and entertainment segments for both the domestic and international markets. Among its products, cheese sauce and nutritional beverages are two of the fastest developing worldwide categories. Gehl has seen a 55 percent increase in international sales since 2015 and exports its products to 19 countries and the 27-member European Union.

"It is a great honor to receive this Export Achievement Award. The building of our export business is a primary focus at Gehl Foods, and we have grown to sell our products in 46 countries worldwide through the efforts of our dedicated workforce and distributor network," said Gehl CEO Eric Beringause. "Many thanks to our friends at WEDC, the Wisconsin Manufacturing Extension Partnership, the Madison International Trade Association and ExporTech for all their help and support."

Optimum Vehicle Logistics - Founded in 2007, OVL is a distributor and exporter of military vehicle spare parts. The company has customers in 37 countries on six continents, supporting U.S. manufactured equipment operated by US and foreign forces. OVL is an independent distributor providing spare parts for High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicles (HMMWV) vehicles, and an authorized distributor for Oshkosh Defense, JLG, Navistar, and General Dynamics Land Systems Canada. Exports make up 98 percent of the company's total sales, and its revenues hit a record high in 2017.

"We are honored to have been chosen for this distinguished award. I would like to thank WEDC for its continued support for helping us extend our reach to new markets by providing funding for some of our marketing efforts," said Stephane Dermond, president of OVL. "Awards of this nature are a direct result of extensive international travel. At times, it can be difficult to balance family life and growing a business. I would like to thank all my employees who contributed to the success of the company, as well as my family, who have supported me through the journey".

In addition to the three winners, there were six semi-finalists for the award: American Exchanger Services Inc. (Hartford); Bryant Products (Ixonix); Great Northern Distilling (Plover); L&R USA Inc. (Milwaukee); and L.B. White Co. (Onalaska).

Many of the winners and semi-finalists have utilized programs from WEDC to develop an export strategy and increase their overseas sales. Several are graduates of ExporTech, an export acceleration program developed in partnership by WEDC, the Wisconsin Manufacturing Extension Partnership (WMEP), and the UW-Stout Manufacturing Outreach Center (MOC). Several have taken part in WEDC trade ventures and missions, and have received grants for their exporting initiatives. For more information on WEDC's exporting programs, visit inwisconsin.com/export.