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'Band Dads' marching on

Clubhouse Trailers is led by pair of savvy entrepreneurs

By Jim Stafford
OCAST

EDMOND — Drew Taylor and Jeff Hadley describe themselves as the ultimate "band dads," although in reality they are savvy entrepreneurs guiding phenomenal growth of their Edmond-based business called Clubhouse Trailers.

Launched in 2010 with the delivery of a single trailer for the Edmond Memorial High School marching band, Clubhouse Trailers is on target to deliver 50 trailers to high school and collegiate bands across the nation in 2020.

Clubhouse Trailers was recognized in 2019 by the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber Metro 50 awards banquet as the fastest growing privately held company in the OKC metro area. Qualified companies have to have at least \$1 million in revenue for the previous year.

Today, the company operates out of two large buildings constructed specifically for Clubhouse Trailers and opened in December 2018. It employs 11 people.

The Clubhouse, as the founders like to call it, started in response to a request in 2008 from then Edmond Memorial band director Lynn Ann Feroli.

"We were the go-to band dads, and our band director came up to us one day and said, 'Guys, I don't care what you have to do, but I want a trailer,'" Taylor recalled during a recent tour of Clubhouse Trailers' 22,000-square-foot manufacturing campus.

"We said, 'Yes, ma'am,' because we're dutiful band dads, and we spent two years figuring out what that meant," he said. "We were shocked that no one had figured out a better way. That was really the a-ha moment."

Until the band dads delivered Edmond Memorial's 53-foot "Bulldog One" in 2010, the band's instruments and equipment were transported to marching competitions and events in five small trailers.

"We rolled that trailer to the first contest in September of that year, and Drew and I spent more time giving tours than doing what we typically did at a band contest, moving and repairing equipment," Hadley said. "We still didn't recognize it as a company until several years later."



Drew Taylor, left, and Jeff Hadley are founders of Clubhouse Trailers in Edmond. [SUBMITTED PHOTOS]

After completing their first project from the original "clubhouse," a 3,200-square-foot Edmond shop, the pair delivered a single trailer in each of 2011 and 2012, and a total of 10 in the first seven years of the business.

The trajectory took a big upward turn in 2017 with 10 trailers delivered, followed by 23 in 2018 and 45 in 2019.

Clubhouse Trailers sources used 53-foot semitrailers that were moving vans in their previous lives for companies such as Atlas and Allied van lines. Costs for each school project range from approximately \$60,000 to \$120,000, depending on features and level of customization in each project.

The refurbished trailers are funded by the school districts, or districts in partnership with band booster groups, or in some cases through donors.

"Oftentimes a trailer makes sense, so a district will choose to fund the entire project," Taylor said. "In some cases, it will be a public/private project where the district will cover the trailer portion of it and the booster organizations fund-raises and handles the build-out and wrap and some of the unique features that go into the trailer."

Clubhouse Trailers' customers are typically larger Class 4A, 5A and 6A schools, as well as collegiate programs and some summer drum corps programs. The Clubhouse has



Jeff Hadley demonstrates the "tubavator," designed by Clubhouse Trailers to lift heavy instruments like tubas and sousaphones.

a big concentration of customers among Texas school districts.

"We currently have customers in 13 states," Taylor said. "Our customers come to us almost exclusively through word of mouth. We have built incredible relationships with customers that we have already worked with, and they become huge brand ambassadors for us."

Clubhouse built its reputation on innovation and



The "perch" allows band directors to efficiently address the entire band.

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the country to regulate the country's smooth borders ahead.



Ramps that automatically lower and raise can be added as part of the Clubhouse customization package. [SUBMITTED PHOTO]

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customization. It installs space for uniform and instrument storage in each trailer, as well as interior and exterior LED lighting. A graphic artist creates the striking graphics that adorn the trailers and make each one a rolling billboard for the community.

Customization can include ramps that automatically lower and raise, a band director's "perch," which is a floating second floor that can be raised to accommodate larger equipment beneath it, and a "tubavator," which is an automatic lift for heavy instruments like tubas and sousaphones.

The Clubhouse founders

say their business growth was aided by mentorship of Kevin Barber, extension agent for the Oklahoma Manufacturing Alliance. Barber helped Clubhouse connect with critical vendors like aluminum fabricators, as well as timely advice as the current campus was constructed.

Barber said Taylor and Hadley possess all the traits critical to build a successful venture like Clubhouse Trailers.

"They share a very strong band-dad passion, great business sense and tremendous work ethic," he said. "I'd say that most important to their success is a common vision, the willingness to put in a lot of sweat equity for many years while patiently growing the business and the penchant for operating debt-free."

As the pair concluded a recent tour of their facility for me and my colleague, Debbie Cox from the Oklahoma Center for the Advancement of Science and Technology (OCAST), we wanted to know who the company's competitors are in the band trailer space.

"Band dads!" the duo answered in unison.

"We say that with great heart because we are band dads, and we understand what they are faced with," Hadley said. "And we want to help them build a trailer that they can be proud of and use for years to come."

Jim Stafford writes about Oklahoma innovation and research and development topics on behalf of the Oklahoma Center for the Advancement of Science & Technology (OCAST).



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