

There's Fresh and then There's CrowleyFresh

Story by Amelia P. Smith



CrowleyFresh is one of the only facilities to provide 24/7 availability to store, handle and transship perishables arriving from all over the world.

► When you visit Miami, the last thing you expect is to have to nestle into a fleece-lined, thick coat – much less one that is zipped up to your chin. But if you're in Miami to tour the CrowleyFresh cold-storage warehouse facility, you'll be glad to have that fluorescent parka hugging you as you walk through four separate, multiple humidity and temperature-controlled coolers. Though chilly to us, with temperatures dropping as low as 32 degrees Fahrenheit, the chambers are the perfect temperature for the pallets of pineapple, asparagus, blueberries, pharmaceuticals, wine and liquid food flavorings that are neatly stacked on racks nearly reaching the ceiling.

"You get used to the cold," said Logistics Director Eduardo Campos, exhaling a white puff of air with a smile as he led me on a tour through the coolers.

Early in 2013, Crowley and Customized Brokers, the company's Miami-based Customs brokerage company specializing in the clearance of perishables, announced the grand opening of CrowleyFresh. The 400,000 cubic feet, specialized warehouse, now serving the South Florida market with perishables handling and storage, is one of the only facilities to provide 24/7 availability to store, handle and transship perishables arriving from Latin and South America, the Caribbean, Europe, Asia and the Far East in South Florida.

The facility has 17 access doors, including those equipped with rollers for airline unit loading devices (ULDs) and parking designed to accommodate storage of up to 20 containers. As a bonus, the facility also offers additional non-refrigerated

Above: A CrowleyFresh team member examines a shipment of asparagus. **Below:** CrowleyFresh offers customers sophisticated inventory tracking capabilities. Here, warehouseman Adonis Blanco adds tracking labels.





The CrowleyFresh team, left to right: Eduardo Campos; Yaisy Gonzalez, manager, safety; Alexis Castillo; Debra-Ann Perry, specialist, documentation; Susan Rodriguez, specialist, documentation; and Gloria Carvajal, administrator.

storage space for clients who have a mixed need of dry and perishable cargo.

But what really sets CrowleyFresh apart from other cold storage facilities?

“It’s our commitment to food safety, efficient rotation of products, pre-cooling practices and knowledge of perishables handling and regulation,” said Campos. “Plus we can offer additional value to our customers with the myriad of other Crowley and Customized Brokers shipping and logistics services. No one else can offer the high-quality, full supply chain that we can.”

The CrowleyFresh facility is certified by several organizations to ensure food

safety and integrity. One such certifier includes Primus, which ensures the adherence to an approved food safety and security program based on Good Manufacturing Practices and food safety file requirements. CrowleyFresh has also been evaluated and approved by the USDA and is Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points (HACCP) certified.

Beyond the certifications, Campos’ team knows that the secret to keeping a wide variety of products fresh and safe takes a special touch.

“If you don’t pre-cool perishables, such as fruit, the quality and safety goes down,” explained Campos. “It’s up to us to ensure that doesn’t happen. We built

this facility for customers who care about proper handling, food protection and safety. We want to be the company that shippers turn to for top-quality services.”

To make this possible, the CrowleyFresh facility is equipped with a pre-cooling, forced-air chamber that ensures rapid chilling and sustained cool temperatures. And all of the CrowleyFresh chambers are tightly sealed and insulated to help maintain food safety and avoid cross-contamination. Additionally, the warehouse features nine dock-high sealed doors that lead to the refrigerated loading dock to ensure consistent temperatures throughout handling.

All of this translates to maintained quality for shippers, extended shelf life for retailers and better tasting, safer products for consumers.

► **From Field to Shelf: a Personalized Touch**

Perhaps just as importantly as the company’s commitment to quality services is CrowleyFresh’s dedication to personalized customer care.

“We prefer to do business face to face,” explained CrowleyFresh’s Alexis Castillo, a documentation specialist. “We would rather have interaction with our customers



Above: CrowleyFresh handles dry cargo in addition to perishables.

► **STORY CONTINUED IN FAR RIGHT COLUMN**



CROWLEY AND CUSTOMIZED BROKERS HELPS LAUNCH PILOT PROGRAM ALLOWING SELECT PERISHABLES FROM PERU AND URUGUAY INTO FLORIDA

In October, the **Florida Perishables Coalition** – a non-profit association developed to increase trade in perishable products through Florida’s airports and seaports – kicked off a new, six-month pilot program that now allows for the clearance of cold-treatment perishables, such as blueberries and grapes from Peru and Uruguay, through South Fla., and through CrowleyFresh, as an alternative to congested Northeast ports. Previously these perishables, regardless of their destination, were required to enter Northeastern ports for cold treatment and clearance, but then had to be transported to southern states, such as Fla., for distribution in stores.

Thanks to the efforts of Coalition founders – including Crowley, Customized Brokers Seaboard Marine and Port Miami – the shipper and consumers alike will benefit from allowing these perishables to enter Fla. Shippers will see lower transportation costs and a longer shelf-life for their products; southern-based consumers will see lower grocery store prices on these items; and the Florida economy will see an overall boost of business in locations such as Port Miami and Port Everglades. Additionally, environmental benefits from reduced emissions related to the shortened transportation of these perishables will be experienced.

“These products will rotate through our facility,” said Campos. “It’s good for everyone involved – from the importer to the Florida consumers. Our job is to handle the freight coming in faster than any other port to keep the perishables fresh, cold and moving.”

To learn more about this on-going program, check out this short explanatory video, featuring Crowley’s Nelly Yunta, vice president, Customized Brokers, and stay tuned for updates from Crowley and Customized Brokers when the program ends. ■



Below: Campos visits the King Berry farm in Argentina to better understand their logistics needs.



than send an automated reply. We are always available.”

And “face-to-face” for CrowleyFresh sometimes means traveling great distances to ensure good customer relations. Campos frequently makes visits to customers’ farms in Central and South America to better understand their products and unique shipping needs. He recently visited King Berry, a blueberry grower, in Argentina, and a mango grower in Peru, where he learned about their techniques for ensuring quality from the field to the packing house.

“I go to learn first-hand from them how to take care of their products like they do so we can extend the shelf life,” explained Campos. “Our goal is to be an extension of their companies here in Miami.”

► **Keeping More Than Just Produce Fresh**

When thinking about fresh perishables that require shipping, it’s easy to list the more common imported seasonal fruits and vegetables, such as blueberries, asparagus, grapes, citrus and more. But it’s equally as easy to overlook other types of perishables that require special handling during the process.

“Products such as seafood, flowers, wine and chocolate are also some of our core

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CUSTOMER FOCUS:

ERIC TORRES

Vice-President of Distribution
PriceSmart Inc.



Eric Torres has not only built his career with PriceSmart, but he has also had the pleasure of watching it transition from a single-membership warehouse club in Panama to the fast-growing, publicly traded international business it is today. Since its beginning in 1996, PriceSmart has opened 32 stores in 12 countries and one U.S. territory, and today spans the Central America, Caribbean and Colombia regions. The company touts that it offers high-quality merchandise at low prices for its retail and wholesale members, with products ranging from electronics to clothing to grocery items and more.

“As a low-margin company, we rely greatly on our logistics team to help us put our products in our clubs at the lowest possible price,” explained Torres. “We also look for strong partners that we can trust, and who can support and guide us when we need it. Trust is a big part of any long-term relationship, especially as we continue our company’s strong growth.”

Since the company opened its doors, Crowley has been a key strategic logistics partner supporting PriceSmart’s supply chain with ocean and air transportation, warehousing, Customs brokerage, freight forwarding and trucking services.

“We do a lot of business with Crowley,” he said. “The company has always been one of our primary carriers. Crowley has been great for us and is certainly part of our success story.”

So, when CrowleyFresh opened just down the street from his office in Miami, Torres jumped at the opportunity to investigate the facility as a solution for his perishable shipping and storage needs. Within the first couple of visits, he knew that the services were just what he was looking for.

“CrowleyFresh is a great facility ... state-of-the-art. It’s managed well and the staff knows what they are doing. They have the assets I need in place,” he said. “But ultimately, it had what we needed: mid-temperature, bonded warehousing. And it made sense for us to just continue using Crowley.”

CrowleyFresh now provides warehousing, pick-and-pack and thermal wrap services for PriceSmart’s shipments of wine and seasonally imported chocolates. The CrowleyFresh team also utilizes PriceSmart’s satellite systems to receive, process and ship the company’s merchandise in the same fashion that PriceSmart does, capturing inventory transactions and allowing PriceSmart complete visibility of its inventory.

“The CrowleyFresh team is adaptable and they execute these services as if they were in our facility,” Torres said. “We’ll see how else they can help us in the future. We’re not going to stop growing, and we just couldn’t ask for a better long-term partner.”

products handled,” explained Campos. “Each of these perishables requires controlled-temperature shipping and specialized handling to ensure safety and freshness.”

When it comes to seafood, many Americans would be surprised to know that more than 80 percent is imported and, once harvested, shipments have a very short window during which they remain fresh. Not only is each shipment a race against the clock, but seafood shippers must also stay in step with the intricate choreography that takes place between customs, FDA officials, and the Fish and Wildlife service (FWS). One misstep and the whole shipment could get scaly quick.

“That’s where we can provide real value,” said Campos. “Not only do we understand the requirements for seafood safety, but, being a part of Crowley, we also have immediate access to Customized Brokers’ import specialists and reliable ocean and land transportation services. The entire supply chain is seamless for our customers.”

“And the next time you see a bouquet of rosy-hued flowers in a corner market, consider how they got there. Flowers



require the perfect combination of chilled temperatures and moisture in the air to maintain their vibrancy and potency.”

For Mother’s Day last year, the CrowleyFresh team handled and stored around 100,000 boxes of fresh flowers for Sunshine Flowers, of Miami, in the facility’s humidity and temperature-controlled coolers, and then delivered them to stores throughout South Fla. via refrigerated trucks and insulated pallets. Sweet-smelling success arrived just in time for the holiday rush.

The same holds true for wines and chocolates: cool temps and low humidity are the keys to fresh-tasting and food-safe products. Without the appropriate moisture and ambient temperature, these products could become subject to spoiling and dangerous bacteria growth.

“Understanding the unique needs of these products really is an art,” said Campos. “One that our team happens to be very good at – for nearly any product on the market that requires chilling.”

Now that’s fresh thinking.

? Learn more about...
This cold storage warehouse facility, visit crowleyfresh.com



CrowleyFresh’s pre-cooling chamber



CUSTOMER FOCUS:
MIKE BROX
Owner
The Handler

CrowleyFresh customer Mike Brox is known as “The Handler,” in South Fla. – and for good reason. His third-party logistics (3PL) company, under the same name, has coordinated warehousing and freight forwarding solutions for his clients for many years. His business, though diverse in the products “handled” focuses heavily on air freight, freight forwarding, distribution and inventory services for both Florida-grown and Chilean-imported blueberries.

One of CrowleyFresh’s first customers, Brox began taking advantage of the cold-storage facility’s perishable storage and distribution services even before the doors were opened.

“Eduardo [Campos] and I have a long history of working together,” explained Brox. “He initially was what brought me in, but since I’ve been using CrowleyFresh, I’ve seen the other services and expertise the company can provide. I’m very pleased with not only the facility, but also the industry and product knowledge the customer reps have. They know that blueberries have different needs than salmon. That’s what concerns me and I appreciate that the CrowleyFresh team understands that.”

Nearly a year after coming on board, Brox has now expanded his portfolio to include Crowley’s freight forwarding and he has also helped many of his customers make the switch to Customized Brokers’ Customs brokerage services, as well. Additionally, he’s enjoying some of Crowley’s creative logistics capabilities.

“For many seasons I have moved fruit from Central Florida to Miami, but it has been difficult to find appropriate, cost-wise trucking,” explained Brox. “But for the past two seasons, Eduardo set up a solution: I am now using Crowley’s containers that are already traveling from the Gulf Coast to Miami. As the containers pass through Central Florida, my blueberries catch a ride, or are ‘back-hauled,’ to South Florida. It’s been very cost effective and beneficial.”

Brox also noted that “it has been nice to use the same company for multiple services,” because it saved him time and effort.

Left: In 2012, CrowleyFresh handled nearly 100,00 boxes of fresh flowers for Valentine’s Day.