

## Connecting the World Through Erie, Pennsylvania

Headquartered in the Flagship City: Logistics Plus has global reach, growth since 1996



**T**alk to anyone who has lived or spent significant time in Erie, and you're likely to hear about one flag in particular. You might see it waving from porches, strung across business storefronts, or on bumper stickers, T-shirts, or mugs: "Don't Give Up The Ship."

So the legend goes, Oliver Hazard Perry sketched those words to serve as a rally cry during the Battle of Lake Erie, fought during the War of 1812. In Erie, a place celebrated as "The Flagship City" (so named after the U.S. Brig *Niagara* that Perry steered to triumph) history is alive in the present. And the flag that Perry once flew serves as an inspiration for our city on the rise.

But Perry's flag isn't the only one

flying in Erie. Atop the historic Union Station building at 14th and Peach, in the heart of downtown, some 50 flags ripple in the wind, and fall still in the calm. They are in Erie, too, as an inspiration to our future thanks to Logistics Plus.

"It kind of started out with us saying, let's put a flag for either every office or every employee that we have at Logistics Plus to show that we are a true global company and a melting pot of cultures," Yuriy Ostapyak told me. He is the Chief Operating Officer at Logistics Plus (which encompasses freight transportation, warehousing, fulfillment, global logistics, business intelligence, technology, and supply chain management solutions) and is

headquartered in Erie. "It's important to us to showcase our global reach, our growth, just how many places we actually do business with, and how diverse our workforce is."

Among the flags atop the building, which Logistics Plus founder Jim Berlin purchased in 2003, is one representing Ostapyak's homeland: Ukraine. Ostapyak arrived in the United States when he was just 16 as a foreign exchange student. He attended Villa Maria High School, and decided to stay in the Erie area, where he attended then-Edinboro University of Pennsylvania. It was there that a professor introduced Ostapyak to Berlin, who founded Logistics Plus in 1996. Ostapyak started in the warehouse, sorting



Nearly a quarter of the one thousand employees Logistics Plus now has worldwide work in Erie, Pennsylvania

and shipping shoes, and, as he told me, “one thing led to another, which led to another...”

Logistics Plus, which boasts nearly \$500 million in global annual revenue, employs nearly 1,000 people, and has more than 60 offices and warehouses worldwide, has grown to what it is because mentorship, talent attraction and retention, and a hunger to grow permeates the workforce, starting at the top. When asked what he loves most about the work he specifically does with the company, Berlin rattles off: “Mentor. Excite. Find ways forward.”

Berlin isn’t one to mince words. He is a guy who has bet big on Erie by making an investment in a struggling part of a city, before the more recent downtown improvements. Berlin has stated in company literature, “I always said if downtown Erie comes back, I’ll look like a genius, but at the time I bought the building, I looked like the dumbest guy in town.” It seems safe to say at this point that he is solidly the former.

The global logistics industry is a massive one: at about \$800 billion,

and Logistics Plus is relatively small in comparison. However, Logistics Plus is regularly recognized as one of the fastest-growing transportation and logistics companies, a top 3PL, a successful freight brokerage and warehousing provider, a leading project cargo manager, and a certified great place to work.

For outsiders, the industry jargon might be tough to understand at first. Although he isn’t tired of getting the question, one Berlin often gets is the obvious: So what is it that you do? “I always tell them, ‘we move stuff’ – and so much more,” he tells me. That *so much more* includes proclaiming and establishing the first and only *National Logistics Day* (which is June 28) to recognize the importance of the logistics industry which is often a first responder in the face of global crises. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the company procured and shipped much-needed personal protective equipment to frontline responders. And when Russia attacked Ukraine, the company rallied support locally and beyond to Ukrainians, raising over \$660,000 in relief

and providing other aid. And that’s not even scratching the surface.

Berlin has a get-stuff-done kind of attitude that’s been both at the core of the growth of Logistics Plus (they most recently expanded their local operational footprint by acquiring the Erie Times-News building a few blocks away from their current location), and serves as a welcomed spark in a city ever-inspired by that declaration: Don’t Give Up The Ship (or as Jim likes to say, “Don’t Give Up the Shipment”).

Berlin isn’t giving up any time soon. But with the reach of Logistics Plus spanning the globe, why stay headquartered in Erie? As he puts it, his decision to keep Logistics Plus in Erie serves as “one of the ‘antidotes’ to Erie’s brain drain, it keeps kids home and helps bolster Erie’s middle-class.”

“We love Erie, love the Erie community,” Ostapyak told me. “We’ll continue to develop and grow in all markets, but we have no plans on moving out of the area. It’s been our headquarters the past 26 years, and it will remain our home going into the future.”