

BRIGHTON

# The accidental movers enjoying the ride, mostly

By Christine MacDonald  
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Keith Ladinsky got into the moving business to support his music career three years ago after several friends called the same weekend asking if they could use the van to cart their belongings to new apartments.

Now more people know him by his corporate name — Man with a Van.

Tyler Hawkins, then a sophomore at Northeastern, needed tuition and beer money after he lost his job at a dot.com.

So he organized his fraternity brothers into Ty's Moving Crew in 1999. Since then, he said they have provided the muscle for about 1,400 Boston-area moves.

"I just sort of fell into this, and it worked," said Hawkins, 22.

Meanwhile, Juan Hoyos launched Latin Movers two years ago to tap the large Hispanic community in East Boston and across the North Shore.

What Ladinsky, Hawkins, and Hoyos have in common besides an insider's knowledge of heavy lifting is they each cater to niche markets.

Ladinsky said about half of his customers are college students, whose possessions fit into a van. For those who already have the wheels, Hawkins's crew offers manpower far cheaper than larger competitors such as Gentle Giant and Olympic Moving and Storage, while Hoyos caters to Latin American immigrants in their own language and neighborhoods.

This month, with college students moving out of dorms and

apartments, they are gearing up for the bustling summer season. By August and September, the busiest months for moving in these parts — when even the rental vehicles are often sold out — they said they often work seven-day weeks, contributing their small parts to what the Federal Motor Carriers Safety Administration says are about 1.5 million household moves nationwide. The agency says most go smoothly each year, but the industry is besieged by complaints.

"My friends always joke that I'm going to have a fleet one day. But right now, I'm just trying to work eight hours every day," said Ladinsky, a 27-year-old Brighton resident. "For a lot of people, who just need help moving a couch, they see 'Man with a Van' as just right for them," said Ladinsky, a New England Conservatory-trained musician, who said he initially bought the van and honed moving skills lunging around his 450-pound jazz organ.

Last Monday was an ideal workday for Ladinsky. He moved an elderly man and the contents of his Newbury Street apartment, did another job in Somerville, and later headed to Harpers Ferry for an evening gig, playing keyboards in the band Eastern Sun.

Hawkins said his crew of friends and frat brothers do dozens of jobs a week, squeezing them in between classes, fraternity public service activities, and partying.

He said he got into the business after working at \$12 an hour for one Boston-area moving company. He said his business has



GLOBE STAFF PHOTO/JANET KNOTT

"My friends always joke that I'm going to have a fleet one day," says Keith Ladinsky, 27, of Brighton, here moving a desk. "But right now, I'm just trying to work eight hours every day."

been impervious to the economic decline that ended his dot.com career.

That's not the case for Hoyos, however. When he bought his truck two years ago, he figured a moving company would offer steady work serving customers, many working two or three jobs, leaving them with cash but no time for moving.

Yet Hoyos's market niche has largely evaporated along with service and manufacturing industry jobs that employ large numbers of immigrants. "Maybe people are moving less" or have cut back on moving expenses, said Hoyos, who hasn't yet been able to quit his hotel job and work for his company fulltime.

Hoyos said he might close un-

less things pick up this year. And it's hard to say how long Ladinsky and Hawkins will be in business, either. "The Man" says he would give up the moving business in a heartbeat for a chance to work full time as a musician. Hawkins, who will graduate from Northeastern next spring, said he dreams of becoming a multimillionaire entrepreneur some day — in some less-strenuous field.

"It's not what I picture myself doing in 10 years," said Hawkins, who has chipped his teeth, broken a toe, and ended up bruised from moving mishaps. "But at the end of the day, you can pay your tuition and go to the bar and pay your tab. In college that's what it's about."

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