

DeCarololis still motoring

■ Truck lessor continues to grow despite rivals, economy.

SEAN DOBBIN

STAFF WRITER

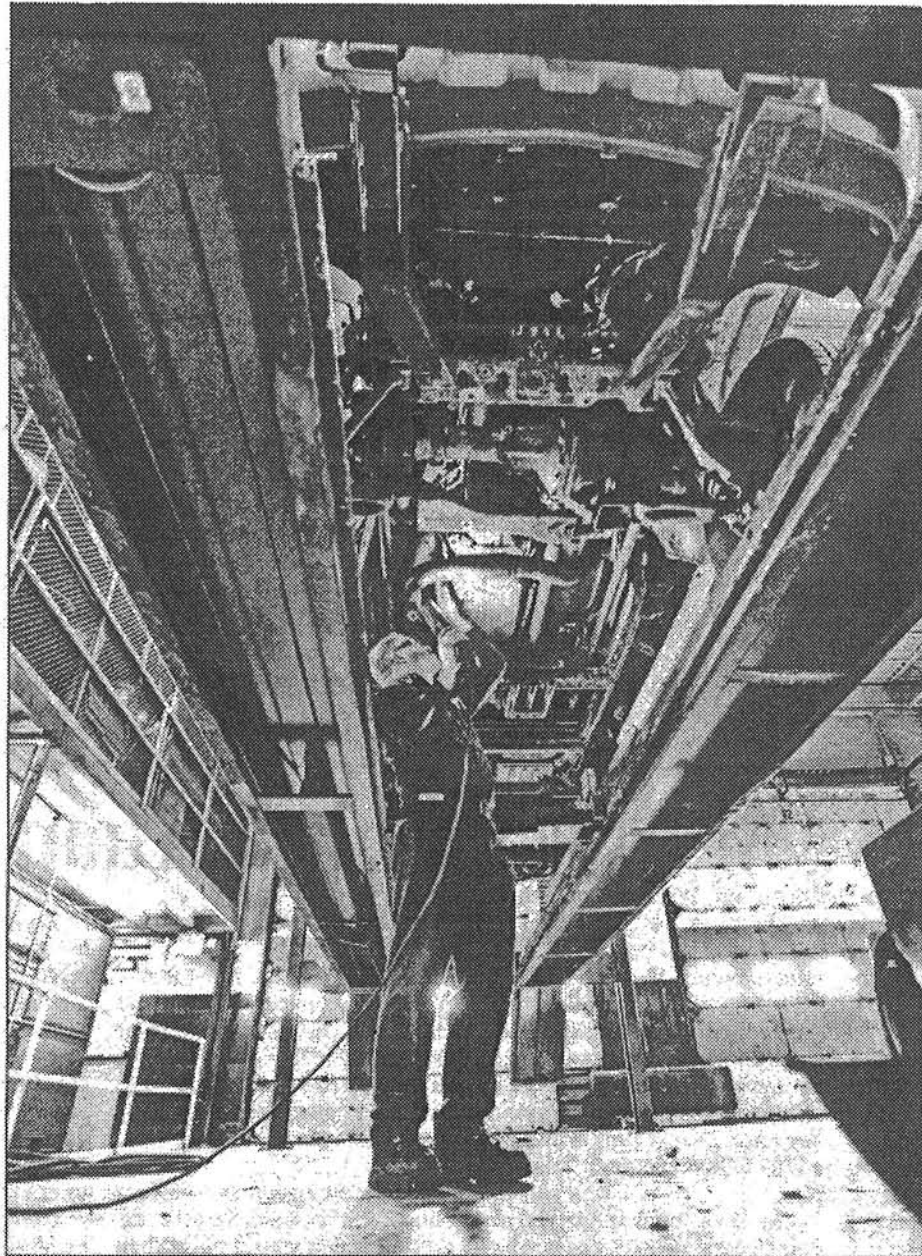
There's a running joke at DeCarololis Truck Rental Inc. that when new truck emission regulations take effect in 2010, the exhaust will be so clean you'll be able to suck on the tailpipe.

But the additional cost of new trucks and the expense of training mechanics on the more stringent specifications are no laughing matter for the Rochester-based truck leasing company. Combined with a struggling economy and erratic fuel prices, it wouldn't be surprising if the company was on the verge of panic.

Fortunately, having existed in the truck leasing and rental business for 71 years, DeCarololis has been through its share of ups and downs. Despite tough economic conditions, the company opened locations last year in Binghamton and Elmira, and has increased the truck servicing portion of the business by 75 percent since 2006.

Truck leasing used to make up the lion's share of DeCarololis' business, but the company has evolved to generate income from a variety of sources. Its service bays now account for about one-third of the company's sales, while parts stores in Rochester and Geneva also bring in some cash.

"From a company standpoint, we'll survive whatever comes through," said Wayne Bowser, DeCarololis' president and chief executive officer. "We're just trying



Clayton Champion of Hamlin, a mechanic at DeCarololis Truck Rental, pulls a transmission line. The company expects demand for mechanical service to continue to rise.

to keep our ear to the street and find out what the customer needs."

Today, truck leasing makes up only about one-third of revenues. As area manufacturers cut back and local truckers have less freight to move, some customers are choosing to fix

up their older big rigs rather than invest in a new truck. DeCarololis responded by adding more mechanics — it now employs a total of 150 people at seven locations across the state — and Bowser expects service revenues to continue to increase this

year.

The company has also been tinkering with the idea of offering two-year truck leases, as opposed to traditional six-year contracts.

"In this economy, in some ways customers aren't feeling sure," said

Bowser. "They probably know what their business feels like the rest of the year, but they don't know beyond."

The company declined to disclose revenues, but Bowser predicted that DeCarololis' business will slow somewhat in 2009. While the company still has its reliable seasonal business to count on — local florists just returned DeCarololis vans after completing Valentine's Day deliveries — Bowser said the rental portion of the business will likely be hurt the most.

DE CAROLIS TRUCK RENTAL INC



In a recession and with large national competitors like Ryder and Penske constantly fighting for market share, DeCarololis' value-added services are more important than ever. The company offers customers substitute trucks during repairs, highway tax services, driver training, on-site fueling and washing, and it continues to offer 24-hour service coverage as competitors cut back.

Chuck Bianchi, vice president at Rochester-based food distributor JFS/Curtze, used to have contracts with multiple truck lessors to keep them all fighting for his business. But he eventually turned all his trucking needs over to DeCarololis.

"They keep developing new service models each year to add to the value of your lease," Bianchi said. "If it's not service on the road, it's service in your yard, it's washing the vehicles, it's fueling the vehicles. They take the headache away and they make it their problem." □

S DOBBIN@DemocratandChronicle.com