

Gradlyn: Moving Everything from Ants to Elephants

By Joyce Dexter, Editor, The Portal

Frankfurt, Germany, has long been a hub for transport flights used by the U.S. military and other entities requiring specialized services. “It has one of the best connections in Europe and is the number one airport when it comes to transporting animals as well as for cargo transport in general,” says **Faruk Berberovic**, CEO of **Gradlyn**, an IAM Core member that has developed an important niche among movers.

Since it was first registered in Germany in 1968, Gradlyn has transported only animals, starting with U.S. military members returning to America from their overseas deployments who had to use commercial flights to get their pets home. For the past 15 years, Gradlyn has worked under contract with the U.S. military. Over the years, the company has provided services for many organizations that put a high premium on the safe and reliable transport of animals.

“We handle police dogs for U.S. police departments,” Berberovic explains. “We organize a pickup service at training schools in Germany and arrange the flights. We also transport mine detection dogs.” In fact, before Berberovic began working for his father-in-law, an owner of Gradlyn, 11 years ago, he had a contract with a company that trained mine detection dogs.

Bosnian by birth, Berberovic has been a co-owner of Gradlyn for the past nine years. He met his colleague and fellow Bosnian, **Vedran Gazic**, who was working in the cargo department of an airline that shipped live animals—including for the world’s largest supplier of tropical fish—through the customs office in Frankfurt. The two became friends, and eventually Gazic joined Gradlyn. He now oversees the company’s branch office in Munich.



Faruk Berberovic addresses ILN members in New Orleans last October.

Gradlyn handles about 200 to 250 shipments a month, the size of which varies greatly. “It could be one dog or 40 dogs,” Berberovic explains, “or thousands of tropical fish.”

About the only animals Gradlyn doesn’t handle are livestock. Otherwise, says Gazic, “We ship everything from ants to elephants.” A member of the World Association of Zoos and



Aquariums (WAZA), Gradlyn plays a unique role in support of breeding programs. The company once was tasked with organizing the transport of 11 elephants to the San Diego Zoo on a chartered flight, and the preparations took two years. Gradlyn also arranged the relocation of a rhino from Germany to a Japanese zoo, and frequently works with an organization dedicated to saving animals from European zoos and transporting them to sanctuaries in South Africa.

Berberovic and Gazic have actively cultivated relationships with professional organizations, in the process building their business and educating others about their role in the industry. Gradlyn also is a member of FEDEMAC, the Animal Transport Association and the International Pet and Animal Transport Association.

“We work very closely with the Young Movers Conference as a gold sponsor,” says Berberovic, “and have been doing presentations at their annual meetings. A few years ago, we met [IAM Director of Programs] Brian Limperopulos at the YMC in Budapest. Over time, we started talking about IAM. Last year we approached Brian and began the process to join.”

Berberovic and Gazic hosted an exhibit booth at the IAM 54th Annual Meeting in New Orleans in October. “Events like this happen only once a year, but you feel like you are part



White tiger cubs await transport to a zoo.

of the family,” says Berberovic. “Through the exposure and networking, there are many more opportunities to organize the transport of pets.”

Although they hope eventually to open an office in Berlin, they have no plans to expand outside of Germany. “We try to use existing partners in areas where there are local companies,” Gazic explains. “It’s kind of a gentleman’s agreement—we all work together and everyone gets a piece of the cake.” Gradlyn has about 20 employees and seven contractors who handle ground transportation for the company.

The two men get great satisfaction from what they do and enjoy the personal contact with clients. “When people come to the office and feel they can trust us, know that their pets are in good hands, it is gratifying,” says Berberovic. “They tell us, ‘These are my kids.’ We know exactly what to do, and organize all the documents. If we can take over those jobs, the owners have less stress because they are confident in us. After all these years we know who to work with as partners—we would never use an airline we aren’t 100 percent sure of. We are selling a service. Just one mistake can be ruinous—everybody talks about their bad experiences.

“I have a war behind me,” Berberovic explains. “After that, you just looked for a job to get paid. When I came to Germany I thought, this is me, this is it—I love doing this every day. Our clients are all over the world. The work is a kind of adventure. I don’t know what else I could do to have this kind of life.”



Vedran Gazic at the Gradlyn booth during the IAM gathering in New Orleans

Challenges are abundant and keep the work interesting. On one occasion, Gradlyn handled the import of a grizzly bear from the United States. “We had clearance at the port but had to organize road transport to a zoo in Romania,” Berberovic recalls. “It involved moving the bear from his cage to our crate by attaching them to each other. So we got the dimensions of the cage. But when the bear landed, the crate was 10 centimeters wider than the cage dimensions we expected. By chance we had a lion crate in our warehouse, so we called the company and asked




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Working dogs from training schools in Germany are shipped in crates by air to police and fire departments in the United States.

them to rebuild that crate overnight. The next morning at 8, the crate was waiting for us at the airport. We then had to transfer the bear from one crate to the other. But the animal didn't want to move. Finally, the woman from the zoo who was escorting the bear suggested using marshmallows to get him into the new crate and that worked. He arrived at the zoo two days later."

Some moments are almost magical. Seven years ago, 13 wolves that had been used in a movie had to be relocated from Siberia to Canada. Berberovic and Gazic found the owner playing with them in the lounge in the Frankfurt airport during a layover. On another occasion, Gradlyn was looking after three-month-old white tiger cubs. "The crate was opened," says Berberovic, "and everyone was playing with them."

Perhaps most rewarding, however, are the occasions when Gradlyn can save lives and keep families together. "We recently

had a dog, Elvis, that couldn't fly with his owners because of problems with documentation," says Berberovic. "The people absolutely had to leave, so Elvis became our office dog for a while. One of our employees took him home at night until the documents were sorted out and he could rejoin his family. The owner was emailing us thank-you's several times a day."

For Gazic, the opportunity to get up close and personal with pets and unusual animals is immensely satisfying. "Spiders, falcons—we have direct contact with animals you see only in a zoo. When the rhino was being loaded, it was good to see how smoothly things were going. We fed and watered the rhino. Doing a normal job you would never have this kind of experience."



A family pet travels with all the comforts of home, including plenty of water, a favorite toy and soft bedding.