

Co-founder of Skyways announces his retirement

By STEVE PEREZ
Sentinel staff writer

WATSONVILLE — Robert Baker, who co-founded Skyways Freight Systems in Watsonville and helped build it into a multi-million dollar corporation, announced Tuesday he will retire at the end of the year.

Baker, 50, founded the company in 1977 along with former IBM co-worker James Watson. Baker, Watson and eight outside investors pooled \$80,000 to start the company in Los Angeles. The company has developed a reputation in the shipping field by merging computer-driven information technology with transportation to serve clients in Silicon Valley's high-tech field.

Kip Hawley, 41, was named his successor. He will take over Jan. 1.

Hawley is vice president of re-engineering for Union Pacific Railroad. His parent company, Union Pacific Corp., acquired Skyway last year after buying a 30 percent stake in the company for an undisclosed sum.

"Skyway and Union Pacific carried out an extensive search to find the best candidate for the position of Skyway CEO and I am delighted with the result," Baker said Tuesday afternoon.

"Although I will sorely miss Skyway and the people I have worked with for nearly 20 years, I am confident that Kip and the new management team we have put in place will lead Skyway to even greater success in the future."

Hawley said that the company has achieved "a remarkable record of growth under Bob's leadership."

"Our job now is to build on that record and establish Skyway as the unquestioned leader

in the field," he said.

Skyway came to Live Oak in 1982. In 1987, it opened up new corporate offices at the Westridge Business Park in Watsonville.

By the time the company became a wholly-owned subsidiary of Union Pacific, it had total annual sales of \$120 million and 750 employees, 150 in Watsonville.

Hawley joined Union's railroad subsidiary in 1992 after five years as vice president of external relations for the parent company. He was born in Waltham, Mass., graduated from Brown University and has a law degree from the University of Virginia.

He practiced law in Boston, served on the staff of Sen. John H. Chaffee (R-Rhode Island) and was an executive for Citicorp's Mid-Atlantic regional consumer loan business.

Hawley served in the Reagan administration as deputy assistant to the president for inter-governmental affairs and held a number of other senior-level jobs in the White House and Department of Transportation.

As vice president for re-engineering for the railroad, Hawley is credited with leading the effort to assess its work processes to improve service quality.

Before that, he was vice president of transportation services, responsible for centralized train dispatch and crew management operations, transportation planning and evaluation for the company's 19,000 miles of railroads.

Those two experiences, he said, gave him "a strong appreciation for the importance of focusing our entire organization on meeting customer needs and providing exceptionally reliable service."