

Blaine importing company helps move cars, items across border



▲ Jayde McElroy, vice president of Bidbuy Importers, poses with San Juan Airlines' plane at Bellingham airport, after helping Canadian snowbirds travel to the U.S. Photo courtesy Jayde McElroy

BY CONOR WILSON

After the U.S./Canada border closure last March, many Canadians had left behind cars, boats, bikes and other equipment in the U.S. With the closure to non-essential travel, it was nearly impossible to retrieve these items, which presented an opportunity for Jayde McElroy, vice president of Bidbuy Importers in Blaine.

Bidbuy Importers, an auto importing company, usually imports cars for dealerships and private buyers, but with the border closed and importing in decline, McElroy said the company began returning Canadian residents' property across the international boundary. However, the opportunity did not end there.

"We got so many people saying, 'I want to travel. I want to go to California. Could you transport my car or RV over the border?'" he said. "We thought about it and said, 'Yes, we can do that.'"

Although Canadian travelers cannot drive across the border, they can still fly over it. But they would be unable to bring their own car or RV. To help those trying to take their vehicles to the U.S., Bidbuy began transporting customers' cars from B.C., while their customers catch a flight on San Juan Airlines from Boundary Bay or Abbotsford.

When customers land at Bellingham International Airport, their vehicle is waiting for them, with the whole process taking

about three hours. It costs between \$400 and \$600 to ship a car, and about \$1,000 for an RV, McElroy said.

Bidbuy is able to make these crossings because it is considered essential as a commercial business. Since the company already had the infrastructure and car carriers from car importing, McElroy said the transition to helping residents cross the border went smoothly.

Bidbuy has helped roughly 150 customers cross the border since the start of the pandemic, McElroy said. The busiest time was between December and January, when the company was helping nearly three to four people cross every day. Many of Bidbuy's Canadian customers are 'snowbirds,' people who travel to warmer climates during the winter to escape cold temperatures. For those on the West Coast this often means California. Others, he said, are crossing to visit loved ones separated by the border.

This new business venture came at a perfect time for the company, who was beginning to see a decline in operations due to the pandemic.

"Early in the pandemic, dealerships were slowing down and people in Washington and down south weren't buying cars," McElroy said. "Border crossings helped us a lot."

Recently, McElroy said the number of people crossing into the U.S. has declined due to

concerns about stricter restrictions making it difficult to return home. The Public Health Agency of Canada has issued warnings on travel restrictions, advising Canadians to avoid non-essential travel.

In his short time helping residents cross the border, McElroy said his favorite memory has been when his company was featured in a story on CTV, a national news network in Canada. McElroy said he and the camera crews set up on an airstrip at the Bellingham airport when a couple traveling to the U.S. landed and had their RV waiting for them.

"The customers were out there smiling. They had a big RV and their dogs," he said. "The sun was out. It was a great day."

Phase 3 ...

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on average over one-week.

In addition, all counties will move down one phase if the state's ICU capacity surpasses 90 percent. Currently, the state's ICU capacity is at 75.7 percent, with 8.5 percent beds occupied by Covid-19 patients.

Previously, Inslee's "Roadmap to Recovery" plan was two phases and grouped counties into

regions. Every county will automatically move to Phase 3.

Inslee also moved up the next eligible vaccination group – people who work in congregate settings such as agriculture, food processing, grocery stores, public transit, and remaining first responders and workers in jail – to start vaccinations March 17, instead of Monday, March 22, as previously planned.

"If we do this, we have a lot of confidence that we'll have a good summer," Inslee said.

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