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S.F. magnate lends logistics expertise to humanitarian aid



TOM ABATE
Bioscope

Lynn Fritz spent 35 years building a tiny San Francisco shipping firm into a behemoth of global trade, with 10,000 employees in 120 countries focused on moving widgets by land, sea and air.

Old habits must die hard. Because when this 60-year-old San Franciscan sold the Fritz Cos. to UPS in 2001, he started a foundation to give away his commercial cargo-tracking secrets to that orphan of the global village — humanitarian aid.

"A humanitarian disaster is almost invariably a logistical nightmare," said Fritz, who says his frustration grew through the years, as employees at his far-flung outposts periodically got whacked by acts of nature.

"I would think: 'Gee, we're the best logistics company in the

world and we can't do a thing to help anybody," said Fritz, who funneled about \$4 million into the 2-year-old institute that bears his name.

Just last week, the Fritz Institute ran its first preliminary test of a software program designed to help International Red Cross officials in Geneva locate stockpiles of supplies and get them to where they are needed by the most expeditious route.

But creating systems for relief logistics is more complicated than solving ordinary shipping problems.

Institute technology officer Wally Lee offered a real-world example of how difficult it will be to write software to deal with the realities of aid efforts.

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