

# TOWING & RECOVERY FOOTNOTES

Rolling in the  
DOUGH  
pg 14

April 2009

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## STAYING ALIVE

### Even Experts Make Mistakes: Part 3

*Towers give examples of some of their worst errors*

By Jill Coley and Diane Knich

*This is Part 3 of a three-part series on mistakes towers make, including in this article some management and personnel issues. See the February and March editions of Footnotes for Parts 1 and 2, which focused on errors that could lead to property damage, injury, and death.*

**Jeff Littman, co-owner, Century Specialized Towing and Transport, Calabasas, CA:** "Don't ignore little cuts on your hands and legs. It can turn into a nasty infection. I had a small cut and I ignored it for a few days. It was on my right knee. I wear shorts every day. It got big and white and red. I spent 12 hours in the emergency room and the doctor had to cut it open and treat it with antibiotics. The infection moved up my leg and into my lymph nodes. It's called cellulitis. Luckily, I have really good health insurance."



Jeff Littman

Basically, from Monday to the following Tuesday, I was off my feet over a cut that was size of the tip of a Magic Marker."

**Phil Broyles, Broyles Auto and Wrecker Service, Glen Allen, VA.** "The biggest mistake I made when I got into the business back in 1977 was going into the towing business without knowing the cost of operation. In the early years, we operated on a wing and a prayer. For years we flip-flopped between making a few dollars one year and losing money the next."

"Eventually, my wife, who has an accounting background, got involved in the business and turned things around. That helped because I'm a hands-on-type person. Now, before buying any piece of equipment, we do our homework. That's my advice to anyone in the business. Do your homework."

**Scott Burrows, Burrows Wrecker Service, Pendleton, KY.** "A loaded garbage truck had exited the interstate highway and was unable to stop at the end of the ramp. Rather than take a chance on colliding with another vehicle, the driver pulled hard on the steering wheel, made a sharp right-hand turn, and overturned the vehicle in the intersection."

"We responded to the scene with two mechanical wreckers, but these were not quite big enough to upright the casualty in its current predicament so some creative rigging and vehicle positioning were critical to getting the vehicle back on its wheels. A walk-around inspection did not disclose the fact that the suspension was no longer securely attached to the chassis (if the truth be known, I probably overlooked that fact, working in haste!)."

"We began uprighting the vehicle. At the critical tipping point, just as the

vehicle was about to come over onto its wheels, I asked myself, should I have put a catch line on the truck to prevent it from rolling over? Nah!

"While members of the fire, police and highway maintenance departments and others looked on, the vehicle settled down on its wheels, and in slow motion continued to lean, then lean farther, finally tipping over onto its other, until now undamaged, side. It hit like the proverbial ton of bricks and a collective gasp went up from the crowd."

"The police officer in charge then asked, 'Was it supposed to do that?' There's nothing like having your pants pulled down in public. That's why your mother always told you to wear clean underwear."

"I learned several things from this episode: your walk-around inspection is one of the most important actions you may perform at the scene of an accident, and a catch line or a catch truck is an inexpensive investment in time in any recovery situation involving a rollover. Finally, a self-deprecating sense of humor helps diffuse a volatile event where the customer is watching you roll his vehicle inside out!"

**George Connolly, Connolly's Towing Inc., Arvada, CO.** "I've not made too many mistakes in my 33 years in the business, but a few years ago, I spent three and a half days on a job that shouldn't have taken anywhere near that long. A tractor trailer that was carrying a load of 40-foot pipes had flipped on a mountain road. The pipes rolled down a ravine and into a creek. The road led to an old mining town

See STAYING ALIVE, page 4

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# The Big Creep

*Learn to price your towing smart from Wal-Mart!*

By Norman Horton

Be honest now. Every once in a while you've referred to your competitor across town or that law enforcement officer who has it in for you as that "Big Creep." After all, you just know that your competitor is paying him for those calls you should be getting. Besides, didn't a friend of a friend of a friend see him last Christmas walking into a dealership carrying a lunch bag full of cash for the service manager? The very same dealership you've been trying to get a contract with.

Sorry to burst your bubble, but that's really not the kind of "creep" I am talking about — I'll get to that in a minute, so please bear with me and read on.

Like many women, my wife and youngest daughter love to get lost in the zone — the Wal-Mart zone. To me, it always feels more like "The Twilight Zone," with big brother telling you what to do and buy on all of those monitors staring at you throughout the store. And who can miss those big cameras on top of the store watching you come and go? It's all kind of creepy, isn't it?

But, as bad as our economy is, and with retailers going bankrupt right and left, it is amazing to me to see Wal-Mart post a 2.1 percent increase in same-store sales in January.

**Sales Success**

So what is Wal-Mart selling so successfully? A carefully crafted perception, that's what, not unlike what towers sell with the image they present to the public (Maybe that's why a friend

***"They have been quietly raising prices"***

of mine named his company "New Image Towing").

So what is that perception? *Business Week* stated that "U.S. shoppers generally believe Wal-Mart sells the same products as other stores but for 15% to 20% less."

How did they pull that one off? With a constant barrage of ads for "Price Rollback," "Unbeatable Prices," and Wal-Mart's "Every Day Low Prices," along with strategic placement of cheap items in front of the more expensive items — items that can often be found elsewhere at an even cheaper price! But hey, if consumers think they got good deals, who is Wal-Mart to argue with that?

Personally, I think they sell a bunch of cheap junk. Oddly enough, Wal-Mart has had problems with the stores they own in Japan because the Japanese are not buying into the perception fed to us Americans. "In the Japanese consumer mind, they're seen as selling cheap stuff at cheap prices," said David Marra, a principal of A.T. Kearney Inc, a management consultancy in Tokyo.

In case you haven't figured it out by now, I am talking about the big price creep that I have seen at Wal-Mart, the nation's largest retailer. I have sensed for a long time that they have been quietly raising prices while they have been running the competition out of town. This was really brought home to me when I got dragged into the "zone" to pick up some sundry items and groceries.

Being the man in the family, however, I put my foot down (after it was stepped on) and we went to a local hometown grocery store my daughter affectionately calls "gross me outlet." Not quite as clean as a Kroger or a Wal-Mart, and the clientele was a little lower on the food chain than the shoppers at a Whole Foods store (we might all be at "gross me outlet" if the economy doesn't get better soon!). Ah, but the prices! Yes, food prices you can live with. So we made our purchases, then went to Wal-Mart for other sundry items.

Now me being the tightwad I am, I just had to make sure that I didn't make a mistake and get ripped off at "gross me outlet." Much to my surprise, however, there was not even one item we bought there that was any cheaper at Wal-Mart, and the three-pound bag of onions in front of the "Unbeatable Price" sign at Wal-Mart was \$1.20 more expensive than the purchase I had just made at the local store!

Wow, talk about truth in advertising! I guess if you push anything long enough and loud enough, people will believe anything.

**Here's The Point**

Alright, enough about Wal-Mart already. What does all this have to do with towing? Plenty.

Keep this in mind: Because you are selling a service, you are also selling a perception. If you are selling "less expensive" as your image, you might run into competitive trouble if you are in fact charging high rates up front. So if your image is that you are cheaper than your competition, you have to

See BRAINSTORMIN, page 7

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**STAYING ALIVE**

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where a new gambling casino had recently been built.

"The highway department said we couldn't block the road to the new casino, so we had to work on the job for 45 minutes to an hour at a time and only close off one lane at a time. Then we'd have to stop working and wait an hour or so before we could start work again for another hour.

"On top of that, the insurance company placed a lot of restrictions on who could handle certain parts of the job.

"When it was all said and done, because it took us so long, we didn't do well financially on the job. And all the other companies involved in the job, such as the hazardous materials operations and the crane operators, fared well financially.

"Now I know you have to talk about all aspects of a job before you begin. And now, if the highway department tells me it can't close a road, I can say no to the job."

**Bob Berry, Berry Brothers' Towing & Transport, Oakland, CA.** "In my 35 years in the business, I've made my biggest mistakes when I've allowed my temper to dictate my actions instead of taking a deep breath and thinking about I should do. In this business, temperament is tested every day. We deal with lots of difficult customers, and we work long hours.

"Back in the mid-1980s, my senior driver was a few minutes late on a very

cold morning. Then he drove off without cleaning his truck from the night before. It's a company policy that trucks must be cleaned before drivers set out for the day. I called him on the radio and had him return to the office where we had words. I lost my temper and I fired him.

"I wish I would've handled the situation differently, even though my employees now take the policy very seriously. I would do things differently today."

**Joe Pedigo, Joe's Towing and Recovery, Bloomington, IL.** "I've been in the business since 1969. When I started, I was naive about how important your position in the community is to

the success of your business. The appearance of your equipment and your men is very important to your position in the community.

"There's an old saying that perception is reality and there's a lot of truth to it. I missed that when I started in the business. I used older equipment and I repaired it myself. I did a good job. I thought service was the most important thing. Service is important, but it doesn't stand on its own. I would never have guessed that.

"Then I got involved in founding a state towing association and learned from others in the business how important appearance is. Now, none of

See STAYING ALIVE, page 5



Bob Berry

**Busted Deal**

*Break it, it's yours*



Charley Anton

**Charley Anton, Bellamy Strickland Chevrolet, McDonough, GA.** "In 1973, I was selling Chevy trucks for a dealer in St. Petersburg, FL. A body company rep had come by and was promoting his product by highlighting Lexan lenses. He had a hand-held display of a Lexan lens with a .22 caliber bullet imbedded in the lens. It was very impressive.

"Chevy had just come out with the all-new-design pick-up with — you guessed it — Lexan taillight lenses. A young couple came in looking for a pick-up, telling me they were seriously considering Ford, and asked what made the Chevy special. 'I'll bet Ford doesn't have Lexan taillight lenses like we do. Come with me,' I said.

"I took them outside, picked up a softball-sized river rock, and smashed it against the taillight of a new 1973 pickup. The lens shattered into a thousand pieces. I had to buy the lens and the couple bought the Ford."

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## SHORT HAULS

# Industry people, news, shows, awards, and more



At Tampa, you may get to try NRC's rotator

By Cyndi Kight

Email your company press releases, news items, and other information to the editor at [bcandler@traderonline.com](mailto:bcandler@traderonline.com) with any available photos and art.

**A challenge at the March 26-29 Tampa show that's too good to miss!** Instead of your having to watch a demo operator work the controls on some beautiful truck, NRC, one of the world's largest manufacturers of heavy-duty towing and recovery equipment, is offering Tampa show attendees the chance to both share their recovery knowledge and get their hands on one of NRC's beautiful big trucks!

NRC wants four or five Tampa teams of qualified volunteer recovery men to upright a loaded tanker with tractor (80,000 pounds) using one of NRC's Sliding Rotators. Experience with an NRC vehicle is not required but you will have to show that your team is qualified.



Kevin Goodyear with Platinum Line cushions

Sound good? If so, act right now. Call Bruce at 613-421-9734 or Frank at 239-707-0881 today and be among those to use a top-of-the-line rotator without having to pay a dime!

**New FL Platinum Line Dealer.** Platinum Line by Kemps has announced the appointment of Goodyear Wrecker Sales as an authorized dealer for the state of Florida. Goodyear's president, Kevin Goodyear, is a former tow company owner who operated a 50-ton Rescuer II and the Platinum Line air cushions. Goodyear Wrecker Sales, Inc. stocks SuperSwaps and air cushions and offers a full-serv-

## Everyday Heroes

**Peter Sandoval.** This California tow truck driver witnessed a rollover car crash in mid-January and stopped to help. He pulled the driver to safety.

**Paul Grindley.** On a Wednesday evening in late January, this Illinois tow truck driver was passing by a building that was being renovated when he saw heavy smoke coming from the building. He stopped, alerted the occupant of the building's upstairs apartment and helped the man, who had a broken foot, out of the apartment.

*"He pulled  
the driver  
to safety"*

ice shop to service all brands of wreckers, stretch frames, and install any of the Platinum Line equipment.

Contact Goodyear Wrecker Sales by phone 334-347-3297, email to [kevin@goodyearwreckersales.com](mailto:kevin@goodyearwreckersales.com) or go online at [www.goodyearwreckersales.com](http://www.goodyearwreckersales.com). View Kemps Manufacturing's product line at [www.platinumlinebykemps.com](http://www.platinumlinebykemps.com).

**UT Towers Fumed Over Mandatory Notification.** During an early February Utah House Transportation Committee discussion, tow truck operators expressed their displeasure over not being involved with the creation of House Bill 112. The bill would require the companies to enter the vehicle information from a private tow into an existing state database already used when vehicles are publicly towed. The legislation was supported by insurance companies. The committee took no action on the bill to allow a compromise to be negotiated.



50-ton tri-axle Landoll

**Landoll's 2008 Largest-Volume Dealer.** Worldwide Equipment Sales, LLC of Rockdale, Illinois, was named Landoll Corporation's largest-volume dealer in 2008. The company distributes Landoll Trailers and Jerr-Dan Towing Equipment and carries a full line of parts and accessories for both. They also perform service and warranty work on trailers and tow trucks. Worldwide Equipment Sales, LLC can be reached at 815-725-4400 or on the web at [www.NewTowTrucks.com](http://www.NewTowTrucks.com).

**Proposed OR Bill Would Ban Patrol Towing.** A bill to ban "patrol towing" contracts, eliminate commissions for drivers and require the property owner or manager to be notified by the tower before a vehicle is towed from private property may be introduced in Oregon's current legislative session by State Rep. Chuck Riley, D-Hillsboro.

**TowTalk Launches New Blog.** Bill Weihrouch (aka "SkyForum") of TowTalk.net is bound to have the anti-

## STAYING ALIVE

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my equipment is more than four or five years old. It's clean and looks good. And, all of my men wear uniforms. My business has improved."

**Mike Patellis, Alpha Towing, Woodstock, GA.** "Probably the biggest mistake I made in the first 10 years of business was not offering good benefits to good quality people. I didn't put enough value on the benefit package at the early onset to retain quality. If I offered them quality benefits, like bigger companies and industries were able to offer, good people would have stayed. If people like you, they'll work for almost nothing, but they can't turn down a great offer.

"Not spending enough time with the family is another mistake. That's easy to do in any job right now, especially for a guy just starting. If you got young kids, you got to stay out the wrecker biz.

"Finally, not diversifying soon enough. I'm a helicopter pilot and pilot for the sheriff's office. I use contact to further my business. I own an interest in a limousine service and a couple of helicopter services. I wish I'd done that a while ago."



Mike Scott

**Mike Scott, Scotty's Carriage Works, Cameron, MO.** "We had a call several years ago to go to a local camper park area. This particular park had lots of hills and, of course, was wooded. Anyway, we were called to go down and get a U-Haul truck that had lost the drive shaft. Upon arrival we found that the truck had indeed lost the drive shaft and rolled down a steep hill and into the woods. A second truck had been sent out to the site by U-Haul, and the same thing had happened to it, too.

"We began looking over the situation trying to decide why these trucks were having problems. We asked the driver if he was fully loaded. He informed us that no, he was not.

"So we hooked up and began to pull him. Nothing was happening.

"We then looked into the truck and discovered that he was only partially loaded, but with very, very heavy, large rocks. You might say they were boulders.

## RECOVERY NOTES

## Tanker Over!

*Wilburn & Luciano show how to upright it safely*

By Allan T. Duffin

What are the best methods for rescuing crippled tanker trucks? Wes Wilburn and Tom Luciano sponsor hands-on courses to provide the answers. Both men are highly regarded training instructors, as most towers know, and their classes have been a consistent draw across North America and elsewhere.

Wilburn also runs Tow Co-Op, a membership-based club that provides towing and recovery products and services via cooperative buying efforts. Luciano is the northeast regional sales manager for Vulcan and Miller Industries. "Tanker recovery is one of Tom's passions," said Wilburn. "His strong mechanical background and vast experience make him a natural to lead the instruction for this highly specialized class."

For the best hands-on training, Wilburn swears by lifelike field exercises using real equipment. "Over the years I have learned that most mis-



Top Tanker Trainers Wilburn and Luciano

takes that happen on a complex heavy-duty recovery can be traced back to the original decisions of what equipment to use and where things are placed," he explained. "By showing the students what to do in a simulated environment, they'll be better prepared to deal with the real thing."

### First Steps

From positioning equipment effectively to figuring out where to hook

See RECOVERY NOTES, page 10

## SHORT HAULS

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"predatory towing" crowd in a tizzy with his new blog at [www.towtalk.blogspot.com](http://www.towtalk.blogspot.com).



**Move Over Law For AZ Towers?** Arizona's lawmakers will vote this spring to include tow truck drivers and construction workers under its "Move Over" law that already requires drivers to switch lanes for police officers on the side of the road.

**Footnotes Editor Puts In His Two Cents.** Footnotes editor Bill Candler was quoted in a recent story about Brian Bolus of Pennsylvania's Minuteman Towing in the (Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania) *Press-Enterprise*: "Minuteman is well-regarded in the industry, says Bill Candler, editor of an industry magazine. Candler has talked with Bolus for stories because Minuteman is known for its big fleet and its snappy image, says Candler of Towing and Recovery Footnotes, based in Norfolk, Va."

**Freak Accident Kills Woman.** A 21-year old Maryland woman died at the end of January after a truck tire crushed her car's windshield and roof. The tire had come off a delivery truck being towed by 43-year old Roger Smith, an employee of Waggy's Towing of Dumfries, Virginia. No charges were expected to be filed.

**Canadian Tower Charged.** A 33-year old man, believed to be an employee of CRG Towing, was charged with criminal negligence causing death following a late January crash in Mississauga,

Ontario. The tower's flatbed truck was partially blocking a passing lane during a recovery of a vehicle that had spun off the road. A 32-year old man, Jeyakumar Nadarajah, died when his car crashed into the back of the tow truck.

**Tow Extortions By Police In Chicago.** Michael Ciancio, a 22-year veteran of the Chicago Police Department, pled guilty in January to extortion of more than \$3,000 from a tow truck driver. The 56-year-old resigned from the police department in mid-January after being caught in a federal probe of police officers taking payoffs in insurance or towing scams.

Ciancio admitted taking bribes and free personal car repairs in return for sending wrecked cars from accidents to a tow company owner. In late January, another police officer, Jimmie Akins, was also charged for allegedly taking bribes in 2006 and 2007.



Cyndi Kight, author of Footnotes' TowBlog

**Don't Miss Cyndi Kight's Footnotes TowBlog at [www.trfootnotes.com](http://www.trfootnotes.com)!** Make it a "Favorite" on your Internet page and check it often. Simply go to our web site and click on the "TowBlog" icon. TowBlog features towing news, towing heroes, shows and other events you won't want to miss, humor, announcements, opinion on issues, and other information of interest. ☛

## Our Lost Towers

**Amanda Frizzley.** In January, 22-year old Steve Watkins was sentenced to 30 months in prison for a drunk-driving crash that killed Canadian tow truck driver Amanda Frizzley of Winnipeg on Sept. 30, 2007.

**David Edward Comstock.** The 71-year old Laurel Lake/Millville, New Jersey resident died Feb. 8. He was a tow truck driver and general manager for Citron Motor Sales of Chicago for 35 years, retiring in 1990.

**James Joseph "Jody" Dale.** The 64-year old owner of D&D Wrecker Service of Harrison, Arkansas died on Jan. 30 following a fall during a service call.

**Lawrence Roberts.** The 48-year old Odessa, Texas tow truck driver died

Jan. 27 after being hit by a car that slid on the icy roadway. Roberts was working a previous wreck alongside the road.

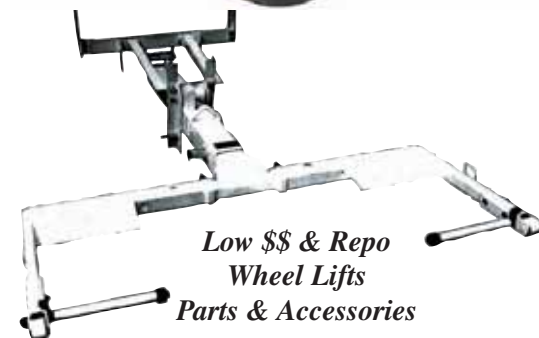
**Danny Little.** The 35-year old tow truck driver for A1 Towing of Orange Park, Florida, was killed on Jan. 20 when a semi-truck slipped off a tow truck and fell on him.

**William Bolin.** The 57-year old Jackson, Tennessee tow truck driver also died on Jan. 20 after his wrecker rolled into a ditch.

**Clarence Wiley.** A longtime tower in Huntsville, Alabama, 73-year old Wiley passed away on Jan. 9 after battling cancer.

Holmes parts Jerr-Dan parts Century parts

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**BRAINSTORMIN**

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put your cheaper items on the front shelf where people see them first.

How do you do that? When you have price-shoppers calling and pricing your services, price the "hot-button" item a little more competitively first. Then, when they are hooked, you can mention the add-ons that the consumer does not pay much attention to, like mileage rates or fuel surcharges and other pricing items people don't key in on.

This is the way you let your prices creep up in this down economy. Nothing underhanded here, just small additional charges mentioned a little later that most consumers will readily accept.

Wal-Mart hasn't been raising their prices all at once — it's been a gradual creep. And people haven't noticed? Why?

Right. And you can do the same. Too often I have seen towers drag their feet on a price increase until they are forced to make a large one just to stay in business. Then they can't figure out why they lost customers.

Learn from the best: Wal-Mart. Don't be a creep yourself; just let your prices do the creeping.

*The views expressed in this column each month are the opinion of the author alone and do not necessarily represent the editorial position of this publication.*

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 <p style="font-size: 0.8em;">2009 335 Peterbilt, 300hp, Automatic, Air Brake, Air Ride, Century 15 Series 22' Steel Stk# 786647</p>	 <p style="font-size: 0.8em;">2009 335 Pete, 325 HP, px6 diesel, 6 spd. trans, air brakes, air ride, Century 3212, 16 ton boom, 2-15,000lb underlift, hyd spades, 6500lb L-arms. Stk# 791100</p>	 <p style="font-size: 0.8em;">2005 M2 Freightliner, 210 HP, Mercedes, 6 spd. trans, Vulcan V30, 16ton, alum body. Stk# M2</p>
 <p style="font-size: 0.8em;">2005 379 Peterbilt, 475 HP CAT, 13 spd. trans, 70" Sleeper, 36" WB, Jake Brake, Century 7035, 35 ton boom, 2-35,000lb winches, hyd spades. Stk# 839185</p>	 <p style="font-size: 0.8em;">1998 FL70 Freightliner, 5.9 Cummins, 6 Speed, Jerr-Dann 26' Industrial, 20,000lb Deck and 8,000lb Winch. Stk# 922347</p>	

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 <p style="font-size: 0.8em;">1997 KENWORTH, 460 HP, n14, 13 spd. trans, Century 5030135, Alum body. Stk# 747913</p>	 <p style="font-size: 0.8em;">2008 KENWORTH T270, Automatic, Air Brake, Air Ride, Century21' Steel RR, Removable Rails, 1-48" Steel Tool Box. Stk# 230920</p>	
 <p style="font-size: 0.8em;">1994 378 Peterbilt, 425 HP, CAT, 13 Speed, 2000 Jerr Dan, 500/280 25 Ton Boom, 2-25,000lb Winches, 3 Stage Underlift. Stk# 350434</p>	 <p style="font-size: 0.8em;">2005 3778 PETERBILT, 370 HP ISM, Cummins, 8LL, Century 5130 Alum Body. 25 Ton Boom, 2-5,000lb Planetary Winches, 115' 3 Stage Underlift, 24.5 Alum. Wheels, 65,000 Miles. STK# 866123</p>	

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# Double Charge

## Two shocking mistakes

**Thomas Henson, Libby's Auto and Diesel Towing, Cornersville, Tennessee.** "After knocking down power lines twice in one year, I've finally learned to watch the end of the boom, to always know where it is.

"About a year ago, and the day before my daughter's wedding, I was bringing home a 500-gallon tank that the local rescue squad gave me after I volunteered to tow away its old, unusable equipment. I was transporting the tank on a Class B wrecker. I wasn't going far so I hooked one cable to each side of the tank and drove with the boom up.

"When I got to my yard, the boom hit and tore down the power lines around my yard. I felt funny. It's like there was some kind of force inside the cab. At the same time, sparks from the power lines started a fire in the yard.

"I got out of the cab, put on leather gloves, and then used a plastic knob to lower the boom. I wasn't thinking. If I would have touched anything metal, I would have completed the circuit and been killed. An electric worker later told me that if I hadn't been wearing the gloves, I would have been killed. When I took the gloves off, I noticed they had burn marks on them.

"The power was out for two weeks. That was a big problem because we were holding my daughter's wedding in the back yard the next day. After the incident, some of the yard was burnt and we didn't have any power.

"We ended up having to move the wedding to my mother's house. She lives next door. You think I would have learned my lesson. But I didn't.

"Two months later, I was burning a pile of brush in my yard. I wanted it to burn faster so I decided to bring over a tank of oil on my wrecker and pour some oil on it. The fire got pretty big. Then I heard sirens from the rescue squad in the distance. I thought they might be coming to my house after seeing the smoke from the fire. I decided to get the wrecker and the tank of oil out of the way because I thought I might get a ticket for using oil on the brush fire. So I drove away fast. And I left the boom up.

"I knocked down the power line at my mother's house next door. At least that time I only knocked out the power to the barn.

"After that, I finally learned a lesson — watch where the end of your boom is!"

## STAYING ALIVE

continued from page 5

"So the moral of the story is to always try and find out what it is that you are doing before you start."

**Joel Domow, All-Custom Towing, Bellmore, NY.** "The biggest mistake I made was not realizing how devious motor clubs are. You really need to be guarded and watch what you say and do, but be up-front and clear, too. Let them know how you feel about certain dispatching techniques. Make sure the PO (purchase order) numbers match every aspect of your job. It's very important to get the name and employee number of whomever you talk to.

"Also, use GPS instead of towers' knowledge because clubs will always bounce the claim. Know their mapping software because they may put you on roads restricted to commercial vehicles. I recommend Garmin because it gives commercial routes.

"Motor clubs make it so difficult and confusing you can lose tens of thousands of dollars. For 15 years I got my butt kicked. Now I make sure to get paid for what I do."

**John Glass, Morristown Auto Body, Morristown, NJ.** "If I'd known in 1980 what the future held, I would have gotten out. Most of us would have gotten out of the industry.

"The cost of operating is getting so high. It's difficult getting people to work. The Northeast quarter is struggling something fierce since the September 11 attacks.

"Fuel costs more, insurance is high. It's an economic issue; it's not just automotive. We're seeing retail stores come and go. The world has changed.

"With the cost of operating and living today, it's survival. It's more and more expensive, and the revenue is not coming in. We see it in our customer base, too."

**Mike Holland, Holland's Wrecker Service, Gainesville, GA.** "My biggest mistake was not joining an association when I went into the towing business. I started in 1970. I get more camaraderie and fellowship out of that. I can call

**"It was 100 percent my fault"**

anywhere in the U.S. and other countries and talk to someone I know. I served two terms as president of TRAA and was president when the Georgia trade associations merged into Towing and Recovery Association of Georgia."

**Roy Carlson, Budget Towing of St. Paul, St. Paul, MN.** "There should be an educational pamphlet put together by the towing industry. You ever see these yellow and black books at the bookstore? "Taxes for Dummies. Investing for Dummies." They have some high-powered people writing chapters in plain language on how to do this stuff.

"They need So You Want to Start a Towing Company for Dummies." In my 36 years of business, I could have saved tens of thousands dollars and anguish. That would have been a great thing. I had no education. We did it by osmosis. Your education is invaluable. You need to get in there and get the education.

"People should attend trade shows. They will tell you secrets. The trade papers are very good, too. You should have one of those in your hands.

"Most starting out in the business do one to five years before they get out. They don't understand it's seven days, 24 hours. And the first thing they do is give away their prices.

"A lot of people are just getting by. I go to conventions and see people run down. I'm 59 years old right now and probably got the body of 30-year-old. I quit drinking and smoking and go for walks. My pet monkey teaches me how to eat healthy, lots of fruits and vegetables."

**Kevin Pilloff, All City Towing Service, Oakland, CA.** "All towers get involved in some type of accident. Injuries do happen. All towers manage



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Brian Bolus



some car damage.

"I'm fortunate that I've been out here for 35 years and only had minor accidents. One comes to mind that could have been career-changing. It was 100 percent my fault and I knew better then.

"It was the wee hours of morning, just a crap situation. I yanked on a piece of chain that was over the top of a rollover casualty on a tractor trailer, the chain came down and knocked me to the ground. And I'm six-foot tall, 260 pounds. If I wasn't looking up, I might not be here today.

"I had uprighted this tractor trailer and was ready to reposition the chains. It was a tight residential neighborhood, and the trailer was full of brass shavings. I undid the chain and was ready to move it. I grabbed hand over hand. The chain was 13 feet, six inches in air, and here comes the hook.

"I was fortunate just to have a big knot on my head. It was a big learning experience. It's unfortunate that it happened, but fortunate that I wasn't hurt too bad, although I probably should have had four or five stitches. It was one of those lucky situations.

"I can tell you, I'll never be grabbing a chain and doing the yank thing again."

**Steve Austin, Project Manager, Emergency Responder Safety Unit, Newark, DE.** "The biggest mistake employers can make is not to outfit employees with a high-visibility traffic vest and put in place a program to make sure they wear them. The vests cost \$40 or less. But it doesn't help if it's in the truck. It's the first line of defense."

**Brian Bolus, Minuteman Towing & Repairs and Minuteman Spill Response, Mifflinville, PA.** "I'm only 36 years old and have the largest towing company in Pennsylvania. I haven't really made any mistakes but I've had revelations, the biggest of which is that this industry doesn't work by merit. Having the best equipment and training doesn't mean that your business will get the call from the state police rotation list. The police simply move through the towing and recovery companies on the list when they need to clear the interstate.

"If I have a 60-ton rotator, that doesn't mean they'll call me over someone with a Holmes 750 even though I could clear the interstate faster. In fact, the company that does the job more slowly would actually make more money.

"I also have a hazardous materials operation, and I wish I could have just skipped the towing business and gone right into environmental side of the business. But I couldn't have afforded to do that as it was the towing business that led me into the hazardous materials business.

"It all works out for me because I can also use our more expensive towing and recovery equipment in the environmental business. But if I were relying on business strictly from the state police, it wouldn't be worth it to invest in expensive equipment.

"That's unfortunate because in any other business, the cream rises to the top." ❧

## MOTOR CLUBS

# Towing Green

*The Better World Club is an eco-friendly operation*

By Tom McMahon

Getting green is not just about making money at the Better World Club, according to the company's president, Mitch Rofsky. The Portland, Oregon-based motor club touts its environmental-friendly policies that include discounted coverage on fuel-efficient vehicles, roadside bicycle aid, and a 20-percent membership surcharge on gas-guzzling cars. BWC also donates one percent of its gross revenue to environmental clean-up.

"Hybrid owners are taking the lead in helping reduce our dependence on foreign oil. They deserve to be rewarded," Rofsky said. "And as for the Dodge Ram 1500 and Hummer H2s, there is really no excuse for nine-mile-per-gallon cars today."

While test marketing American Consumer Insurance (now Better World Insurance) in Massachusetts in 1996, Rofsky was approached by environmentalists fighting AAA over the Clean

tures "AAA Watch," linking users to negative articles about the motor club giant. Rofsky said he has great respect for his competitor's roadside assistance, but disagrees strongly with some of its environmental stances. He said his company's towing payments are generally higher than AAA's, but noted BWC will match them where that is not the case. The business also waives its sign-up fee for AAA members who switch.

### A Good Deal

Qwest Towing Service has been affiliated with the BWC network for four years. "We are a back-end service provider," said Qwest spokesperson Pat Gilbert. "We answer their roadside service calls and validate coverage nationwide."

Gilbert said BWC was the first tow service to introduce electronic payment, typically paying within 48 hours of a roadside call. "It's a good deal for



Air and Mass Transit Act. The former Ralph Nader staffer and president of the socially-responsible Working Assets Mutual Fund seized the chance to compete with AAA. He and boyhood friend Todd Silberman founded BWC and targeted AAA's environmental stances with hard-hitting invitations to join them in going green.

### Fighting AAA

"There is an auto club considered to be Arrogant, Anti-environmental and Archaic," BWC's website (www.betterworldclub.com) proclaims. "Join one that shares your values." Those values include supporting states' efforts to better regulate automobile emissions to reduce carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, and recognizing domestic partnerships in its pricing.

BWC has offered buy-one-get-one-free membership specials for hybrid and other alternative fuel vehicles and recently gave California's newlywed gay couples the same deal.

In addition to its anti-AAA membership pitch, BWC's website also fea-

towers and policy holders," he said. "They provide fast service and a fair rate." TowPartners.com lists Qwest as the nation's fastest-paying towing provider in the country.

BWC provides a full range of travel and roadside assistance benefits to its members, including emergency roadside assistance, exclusive leisure travel services, and home and auto insurance. "Through our travel agency, members receive discounts on a range of travel services – from tours to automobiles to electric bicycles to hybrid electric car rentals," Rofsky said. Travelers can choose remote wilderness retreats, world-class eco-resorts, and "green" hotels (i.e., establishments which utilize energy-efficient practices as well as welcoming service).

The company's "Kicking Asphalt" e-newsletter reflects what Rofsky claims to be BWC's corporate "sense of humor." A recent edition announced BWC's partnering with FairRepair.com, an independent online service that offers users vehicle repair estimates. The newsletter heralded the announcement with the headline, "What!?!?"

*"They provide fast service and a fair rate"*

Some mechanics overcharge their customers for repairs?!?! "I don't think business should be impersonal," Rofsky said. "It should reflect its people."

### Growing Fast

Jim Duggan, owner of JHD Road and Battery in Manassas, VA, said every network has its pros and cons, but characterizes BWC as expedient and professional. He said the company's message appeals to his area's young demographic, which tends to be more environmentally focused. "The environmental message appeals to clients as does the way they conduct business."

Customer reviews as noted on SustainLane.com, an online going-green resource that offers consumer feedback, are overwhelmingly positive. Out of 58 responses, 52 said BWC was good for them, 51 said it was good for their community, and 54 said it was good for the planet.

Three consumers said the business did not work for them, one of them expressing concern that they had to be at the vehicle when the tow truck arrived. One customer wrote that his membership was terminated after he used the roadside service three times within a few months, but Rofsky responded that the company's membership – like most other providers – allows for four roadside calls per year.

Rofsky claims that BWC is one of the fastest-growing motor clubs in the country and has one of the highest member retention rates. Its approximately 25,000 members have an 80-plus percent retention rate, he said. "We are growing about 25 percent a year now." BWC's basic annual rate is \$53.95 per year. Bike memberships are less.

According to Rofsky, BWC now has members in all 50 states, with the majority residing along the Boston-to-Washington D.C. and Portland-to-San Diego corridors. ❧



## RECOVERY NOTES

continued from page 6

onto the tanker, Wilburn stresses careful planning at all times. Before performing surgery at a tanker incident, he said, the tower needs to understand the patient.

During their courses, for example, Wilburn and Luciano first cover the details of how a tanker is constructed. That technical information comes in handy in the field, when towers might be faced with unusual incident scenes that require more than simply pulling a tanker into an upright position.

Faced with multiple options, how can a tower decide the best way to rescue a downed tanker? There are advantages to working the job from the top side instead of the bottom side of the tank, said Wilburn, who recommends using a digital strain gauge to track how the force is being applied. The tool helps the tower make more efficient use of his time at the accident site, providing accurate numbers and eliminating guesswork.

By utilizing the strongest points of the tank, towers can make the most complicated recoveries seem easy. "With the cost of new equipment, does it make any sense not to work your equipment easier?" said Wilburn.

### From The Top

When working the top side of a tanker, Wilburn points to several key actions that will make for a successful recovery. First, take the time to install

## "Tanker recovery is one of Tom's passions"

properly sized and rated snatch blocks in each line prior to making the lift.

Also take a close look at the placement of the truck and the boom, said Wilburn. Placing outriggers gives a heavy-duty or a rotator its best possible stance. In addition, the boom is placed out and over the load so that the operator can work the winches rather than the boom. "This is important for many reasons," explained Wilburn, "including creating a safer working environment for everyone by raising the load with the winch."

This technique can keep accidents from occurring during the recovery process. If a tower booms up with a load and the equipment suddenly experiences a hydraulic failure of some sort — a hydraulic line blowing out, for example — most booms will fall as the safety valve closes shut. "As the valve slams shut, this will catch the falling boom," said Wilburn, "but it will also shock-load the entire system."

Could the unit in this example have been lifted without using snatch blocks? "Probably, maybe," he said.

But, he added, since the cable is the weakest point in this particular lift, using snatch blocks will reduce the load on the cable, winches, and entire boom structure.

### Air Cushions

Air cushions are another tool that Wilburn and Luciano like to use when recovering tankers. During the classes they teach, "We perform a complete recovery using the cushions in conjunction with heavy duty wreckers," said Wilburn. "Using air cushions is an art form unto itself." Add a loaded tanker that needs to be uprighted, and the tower has quite a challenge to solve. In his demo, Wilburn usually places his air cushions starting at the rear and working forward.

Once the job is done, he suggests that towers take extra care with their cushions. "Having the air cushions stored away properly after the last job really dictates how the next job will go," he said. "I am not only talking about having them cleaned up, which should be obvious to most. What I believe is critical is how they have the air removed and how they are 'tucked,' so to speak."

Wilburn recommends that towers tuck three sides of each cushion and let the side with the hose stay untucked.

"From my experience, this works much better," he said.

### Using Straps Only

But what if the tower doesn't have air cushions available during a recovery? Not a problem, said Wilburn: During their classes, he and Luciano host several "wrecker-only" field scenarios, involving heavy-duty trucks and the use of recovery straps.

Wilburn looks forward to teaching another advanced tanker recovery course this year. The host company, John's Towing & Recovery of Durham, N.C., is well equipped for hands-on instruction in tanker recovery techniques. "They own tractors, tankers, and many other items," he explained. "They obtained them over the years strictly for the purpose of doing high-level training."

The next advanced tanker recovery class taught by Wilburn and Luciano will take place from April 17-19 at John's Towing & Recovery in Durham. Towers interested in attending the course can visit Wilburn's website [www.towcoop.com](http://www.towcoop.com) for more information. "Scroll down the menu on the left side of the page and click on 'Towing and Recovery Classes,'" said Wilburn. Towers can also call him for details at 910-486-8928. ☛



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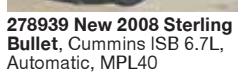
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## FAMILY MATTERS

# Good Men Down

*This towing family carries on after their tragic loss*

By Diane Knich

Lynette Storer always worked hard in the family towing businesses, but she never wanted to be president of the Seattle-area's Burien Towing and Airport Towing. Every year at the company's annual meeting, her husband Mark would tease her, telling her it was her turn to be president. And every year she said, "You can't make me."

But Lynette had to step into the company's top post after her husband and her son Brian, who also worked in the family business, were killed in a tragic small-airplane crash last July. Although she's the company's new leader, she's also the first one to say that keeping the thriving 20-year-old company afloat is anything but a one-woman show.

Mark Storer launched Airport Towing about 20 years ago and opened Burien Towing about three years later. On the day he and his son died, the company had 12 trucks and 10 employees. It also had a reputation, Lynette said, for being a fair employer and integral part of the community.

### Starting Small

The business started small in 1988, with one truck and an Alamo Rental Car contract. Lynette Storer had a home daycare business at the time, and she answered telephone calls for the towing business while watching the children. But that didn't last long, she said. "It's hard to tell five two-year olds to be quiet."

So the Storers got an office and the business grew. It was, in every way, a family business, Lynette said. She and Mark had three children, all now

adults. But as they were growing up, they came to the business after school almost every day. When she interviewed potential employees, she made it clear to them that they would be spending time around family. "If you don't like being with a family, you won't like us," she said.

Many of those employees grew to feel like family, she said, and they too deeply felt the pain and loss when Mark and Brian died in July.

### Tragedy Strikes

It was bright and beautiful Sunday when Mark asked his son Brian, who was working in the family business



Lynette: "The funeral procession. Mark's first antique tow truck, the 1925 Ford Model TT, led the way, followed by our fleet of tow trucks, local fire department engines, police vehicles, and several other tow trucks from around the state. About 150 vehicles drove from the office in downtown Burien to Mark's church that he attended for 20 years."

full-time, to come flying with him in his amphibious airplane. Mark liked to land and take off from Washington State's pristine lakes, Lynette said. That Sunday, Mark landed the plane on Lake Nahwatzel. He and Brian probably got

out of the plane as they usually did, sat on the pontoons for a while and enjoyed the day.

But shortly after Mark took off, the

See FAMILY MATTERS, page 16



Mark Storer with the 1928 Model A Roadster

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forming equally well in extreme cold and heat.

The generator aboard a TomCar is used when needed for auxiliary power to fill tires, weld, or power lights, tools and other equipment when in hard-to-reach areas, repairing construction machinery, or rescuing stranded outdoor enthusiasts. Visit [www.nextgenerationpower.com](http://www.nextgenerationpower.com) and [www.tomcar.com](http://www.tomcar.com). Call Next Gen at 888-463-9879.

## Flipper Foot

Miller Industries has announced the new Flipper Foot for the SP8000 Side-Puller, eliminating the need for a separate spade or pad. The operator can quickly switch the foot from a flat pad



A foot for Miller's sidepuller



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for working on hard surfaces, such as concrete, to a spade to dig in for firm footing on softer ground. See your local Miller distributor or go to [www.millerind.com](http://www.millerind.com)

## Wave It Proudly

Tow companies now have a tough flag-pole holder to mount onto their vehicles. RealWheels Corporation offers the Liberty Vehicle Flag Pole System, designed to exceed the demands required for vehicle placement. The American-made Liberty kit features attractive details and quality components.

It adjusts up or down to accommodate flags and features a 360-degree rotation system that keeps the flag from wrapping around the pole. The Liberty can be purchased with or without the 3 x 5-foot, heavy-duty, double-sewn, polyester American flag. Visit [www.realwheels.com](http://www.realwheels.com)

*"It keeps the flag from wrapping around the pole"*

## Winch Choice

Warn Industries was selected to be the standard winch supplier for Miller Industries' new LCG (low center of gravity) Carrier, with load-deck capacities of 20,000 pounds. Warn's Series 9 hydraulic planetary winch will become standard equipment, with the Series 12, 15 and 20XL winches available as options. The 30,000-pound deck features Warn's 20XL winch, with the Warn 30XL an available option.

Warn Industries is based in Clackamas, OR and supplies a full range of winch and air compressor products to the towing and recovery industry. Visit [www.warn.com](http://www.warn.com) and [www.millerind.com](http://www.millerind.com)

## New Balancer

Jerr-Dan Corporation, a leading manufacturer of towing and recovery equipment, has introduced Jerr-Dan Liquid Tire Balance, a replacement for traditional lead or other metal tire-weight balancers. Liquid Tire Balance is designed for heavy-duty tow vehicles with 22.5-inch and larger rims, and offers advantages of enhanced performance, tire life, and safety.

By maintaining optimal tire balance without the need for re-balancing, Jerr-Dan Liquid Tire Balance increases fuel economy and enhances maneuverability and vehicle control. The anti-freeze and cooling agents in the product reduce heat build-up and con-



Warn winches a Miller choice

## Hybrid Manuals

Wes Wilburn Consulting offers a full line of hybrid vehicle towing, road service, and shutdown manuals. The 2008 manual contains over 25 hybrid models, including the Enova school bus. These quick reference guides are designed for towing and rescue personnel, with clear, step-by-step instructions for each model.

A hybrid vehicle can provide signifi-

cant dangers if the towman or rescuer does not understand the correct procedures for the model involved. The manual is an important tool for any operator or rescue personnel who may come in contact with a disabled or wrecked hybrid vehicle. Call 910-486-8928, email [weswilburn@aol.com](mailto:weswilburn@aol.com) or visit [www.towcoop.com](http://www.towcoop.com)

# THE GEAR MART

New & improved equipment from industry innovators



Shiny safety step stops slips

trol rim rust. Safety is enhanced because hard-to-see valve stem and tire damage is readily visible.

Liquid Tire Balance features an environmentally friendly formula and is easy to install on mounted and dismounted tires. Call your Jerr-Dan dealer or visit [www.jerr-dan.com](http://www.jerr-dan.com)

### Step Safely

RealWheels Corporation has also developed The RealStep, a safety cover designed to fit directly over the side steps used for getting up into a truck. It is wider than the usual plastic step, and features a non-slip tread pattern called RealGrip.



Help securing your ratchet straps

The product is manufactured from polished stainless steel for lasting shine and durability, and features a rugged non-slip surface. It is also available in a black powder-coated finish and LED lights are an option for an enhanced custom look. Visit [www.realwheels.com](http://www.realwheels.com)

### Ratchet It Up

Kinedyne Corporation has introduced StrapPak, designed to help effectively secure the loose end – up to 30 feet in length – of a ratchet strap. StrapPak is a bright, orange mesh bag that attaches directly to the fixed end of a ratchet strap. While it offers a solution

for a wide range of uses, the product was designed with flatbed and utility trailers in mind.

It also is an excellent tool for storing and organizing the loose end of straps when they are not in use, rather than using duct tape or cable ties to secure excess webbing on ratchet straps. Call 800-848-6057, or visit [www.kinedyne.com](http://www.kinedyne.com).

Product demonstration videos are available on Kinedyne's YouTube channel, <http://www.youtube.com/kinedyneincorporation>.

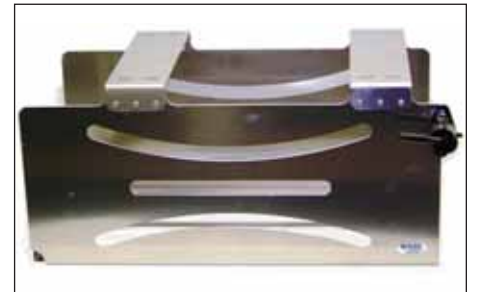
### Bracketed...

In The Ditch Towing Products has produced new aluminum Tire Stand Mounting Brackets (ITD1007L & ITD1007R). The bracket is a great solution for easy storage of aluminum tire stands. The optional Century Adapter



Save fuel at the pump

Bracket (ITD1006) is also available to mount tire stands to the rear of Century heavy-duty bodies with an-gled jack legs. The brackets come pre-drilled for easy mounting to tool boxes or any flat surface. Please specify left or right when ordering. See [www.intheditch.com](http://www.intheditch.com)



Tire-stand mounting brackets

light around and plug in your transmitter for tow lights when ready to tow.

Just flip one switch for your tow lights and another to turn on your strobe. You get up to 20 hours of use between recharges and the lights have an approximate 300-foot range. Call TowMate at 800-680-4455 or visit the web site at [www.towmate.com](http://www.towmate.com)

### Emissions Control

ECO-Systems Solutions USA, Inc. claims that its Fuel Vapor Enhancer, also called an "emissions control optimizer," saves 10 to 12 percent at the pump and lowers harmful exhaust emissions by 40 to 60 percent. It works in gasoline, diesel, propane, CNG, bio-fuel, and Purinox systems.

The Fuel Vapor Enhancer is installed inline on your vehicle's fuel line after the fuel pump/filter and before the fuel injection system. When the fuel passes through the unit it creates a catalytic reaction, breaking up the hydrocarbon chains in the fuel, causing the vapor pressure to increase. This increase in vapor pressure causes the fuel to burn more completely in the combustion chamber, which means lower emissions, increased power, less hesitation and less fuel consumed. Visit [www.2getgreen.com](http://www.2getgreen.com) or call 757-621-5253 or 800-601-0669. ☛



### ...And Strobed

Create a safe work area at your recovery scene with TowMate's new TM-2 with Strobe. One side is a standard TM-2 with marker lights, the other is an amber strobe. Use the strobe side while at the recovery site for visibility, then turn the

## Crane Training



Hirschmann Automation and Control, Inc. (PAT), a leading supplier of crane-operator aids, including load moment indicators (LMI), is offering a series of 10 two-day technical service-training courses held at regional locations throughout the United

States in 2009. The courses will feature classroom training along with hands-on experience using system simulators.

The courses will include system theory, sensor calibration, wiring, and hands-on trouble-shooting, and are structured to meet the requirements of mechanics and operators regardless of their level of experience. Hirschmann will also structure courses for companies at their facilities to meet specific requirements.

Visit [www.hirschmann-usa.com/ecstraining](http://www.hirschmann-usa.com/ecstraining), call 717-217-2223, or email [ecstraining@hirschmann-usa.com](mailto:ecstraining@hirschmann-usa.com)



# Rolling In The Dough

*Tips on building solid value into your business*

By J. Tol Broome, Jr.

Why are you in the business? Perhaps you're passionate about running your own show and not working for "the man." Maybe you just enjoy being in the trenches every day, meeting the towing and recovery needs of customers. You may like the idea that you're doing a better job than the tower down the street and providing a good place for people to work.

All well and good, but how do you stay in the business? That's a different and much more important answer. It's called building value.

For Scott Burrows, owner and president of Burrows Wrecker Service, Inc. in Pendleton, KY, there is nothing more important for the tower than to build value in the business. "Building equity is all about value," he said.

"What a company would be worth to someone buying it or what value remains when ownership changes is key," said Burrows, who is also the president of the Towing and Recovery Association of Kentucky. "For a towing business owner, time and effort spent developing and strengthening various aspects of equity will add to the market value of a company and the overall functioning of the business can be improved."

It is important for the new towing and recovery business to focus on building value right out of the gate, said Donna Coe of Coe Consulting in Portland, Oregon.

"Initially, a key factor to building value is being sufficiently capitalized," said Coe, who also co-owns Speed's Supertow and Fleet Sales West in Portland and Golden West Towing Equipment and Competition Wheel Lift in California.

"Have a viable written business plan and a clear vision for your market niche," she said. "You do this by first doing an assessment of the market and where there is a need to be filled."

## Critical Factors

If you have been in business for a number of years and are well past the start-up stage, there are other critical factors on which to focus. Burrows breaks these into two categories: tangible value and intangible value.

Tangible equity is built by having assets that are worth more than the total liabilities of the company. At a specific asset level, this is easy to assess. For instance, you might own a \$30,000 truck on which you only owe \$15,000. Or you might own a building that has appreciated over time to \$300,000 with a current loan balance of only \$150,000.



Over time, tangible value is built by turning a profit and retaining those earnings in the business. The more equity you build, the more cushion you have to deal with setbacks. Stronger equity also gives you more opportunity to grow because you can use that capital to fund all or part of your growth, rather than more expensive debt.

Burrows said that the intangible value that a towing business builds is also critical.

- First, he pointed to the **customer list** as having value. The customer relationships you establish over time are akin to an annuity. You can typically count on repeat business from a fairly high percentage of your customers, and that reflects future value in your towing business.
- Relationships with **vendors** also build value. "Established relationships with equipment suppliers who provide ready availability of business necessities, along with maximum available discounts provide value," Burrows explained.
- A third intangible way to build value is with **your company's image**. There was a popular camera ad a few years back featuring tennis star Andre Agassi with the tag line "Image Is Everything." In the towing industry, your image differentiates you from your competitors.
- According to Burrows, a final way to build intangible value is **shop location**, adding that the first rule of thumb in real estate is "location, location, location."

Though the intangible value that is built in a towing business is often overlooked, Burrows noted that it is equal in importance to tangible value. "Each of these characteristics of a company has quantifiable value," he said. "Each contributes to equity and is worth something because it would cost time, energy, and financial resources for a start-up towing business to develop equivalent aspects of a successful operation from scratch."

## Valuable Calculations

Measuring value can be tricky. However, there are some standards that can help you measure the value of your towing business. Coe said she starts at the specific asset level. "You need to know and see that each truck in the fleet is earning its keep," she said. "You should know the benchmarks of how many dollars each truck must generate each month in order to not only crack the nut but also to generate a profit margin."

In order to measure the value of each truck, you will need a good cost accounting system. The key is to track expenses, debt or lease payments, and

revenues to each truck, and then factor in an expected profit margin. If the result is a positive number each month, then the truck is pulling its weight for your business.

If the result is a negative number each month, dig deeper. You might find that it is an older truck and that repair expenses and the resulting downtime are excessive. If your fleet is newer, with low repair costs and maintenance, and you have some trucks that aren't adding value, then you either need to increase your revenue level or sell some of the trucks.

Here are some other useful ratios to measure value:

- **Debt-to-net worth (total liabilities/stockholder's equity):** This ratio provides an indicator of how much of your business is supported by liabilities (bank debt, accruals, trade payables, etc.) and how much is supported by the equity you have built. A lower ratio denotes a stronger company. With a capital-intensive business like towing and recovery, this ratio should stay below 4-to-1.
- **Funded debt-to-EBITDA (total funded bank debt/earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortization):** This ratio measures financial leverage relative to cash flow. A lower ratio denotes a stronger company. The rule of thumb here is to stay below 3-to-1.

See ROLLING IN THE DOUGH, page 17

## How To Lose Out

*With tips on staying in*

**Buy too much equipment.** Lose out: Idle trucks will cut into your profits and the value of your business. Stay in: Make sure the demand is there before adding new trucks.

**Get upside-down on equipment.** Lose out: Your trucks wear out before they are paid off. Stay in: Even if the bank offers attractive, long-term financing, make sure you can pay enough on the loan or lease so that the truck is still running when it becomes debt-free.

**Use volume to make up for bad contracts.** Lose out: Some towers get too focused on revenue volume and lose sight of the bottom line. Stay In: If you currently have unprofitable motor club or other contracts, get rid of them at the first opportunity. In this case, you will build more value with lower

revenues and higher profits.

**Overpay for another business.** Lose out: While it is important to always be in a growth mode, many towers have diminished business value by overpaying when buying a competitor. Stay in: Make sure you research thoroughly before you buy, and it is advisable to involve independent advisors such as your CPA in any acquisition process.

**Drain your business dry.** Lose out: Many towing business owners are tempted to use the company checking account to live beyond their means at home. If you drain out all of the equity of the business, you will overburden it with debt and will detrimentally impact its long-term value. Stay in: Keep business and personal checking accounts separate.

# WWW.CECILWILSON.COM



**45 Ton Century**

Cecil Wilson, broker  
205-956-2852  
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**Tri-Axle**

1992 PETE 379 325" WB, 360-400 HP CENTURY 9055 45 TON, Detroit, jake brake, cruise, air ride, 4.11 rear ratio, front floatation tires, 85 MPH, 1997 Century 9055 50 ton plantary winches, 6 sets of forks, chain receivers and chains, spring hangers, Risers, corded remote, 6 receiver straps, 3 snatch blocks, strobe bar, 10 LED side lights, 11R 24.5 tires.



**New 25 Ton Jerr-Dan**

Cecil Wilson, broker  
205-956-2852  
WWW.CECILWILSON.COM

2004 KW 900L New 2008 25 Ton Jerr-Dan HP550 cat, 18 speed, mileage 371,000 approx., rear ratio 355.11x24.5 tires, all aluminum wheels, Dual stacks and breathers, 60" flat top sleeper w/rear window, 2008 25 ton Jerr-Dan, 8 function wireless remote, Bus bars w/ storage racks, 5th wheel with ball and Pental hitch attachments. Plantary winches, extra long Wheel lift, 330" WB.



**New 08 Jerr-Dan 25 Ton**

Cecil Wilson, broker  
205-956-2852  
WWW.CECILWILSON.COM

2003 PETERBILT 379L New 2008 25 ton Jerrdan, 475 cat, jake, 13 speed, air ride, 355 rear ratio, 22.5 tires, all aluminum wheels, 571,000 mileage approx. 322" WB, factory built, 5th wheel, ball and pental hook up, Bus bars, extra long wheel lift w/storage brackets, wireless remote.



**Good Fuel Mileage Truck**

Cecil Wilson, broker  
205-956-2852  
WWW.CECILWILSON.COM

1987 T-800 KENWORTH 350 CUMMINS, 10 speed, new tires, simulators, maroon color, dual 75 gallon tanks. 1987 Holmes 1601 22 ton, 22,000lb winches, hyd spades, 12,000lb zack 2 stage underlift, 154 CA, large tunnel box, all factory hyd.



**35 Ton Challenger**

Cecil Wilson, broker  
205-956-2852  
WWW.CECILWILSON.COM

**AC Cold/Price Reduced**

1980 KW C50 CONSTRUCTOR 1988 35 ton Challenger, 350 cummins Overhauled 100K Miles Back, 10 speed, jake brake, AC color, 256" WB, heavy suspension, 24" big tires, Aluminum wheels, 3 stage boom, 3 stage underreach with forks.  
Engine Overhauled 100,000 Miles Back!!



**Holmes 750 25 Ton**

Cecil Wilson, broker  
205-956-2852  
WWW.CECILWILSON.COM


1979 MACK HOLMES 750, 300 maxidyne engine, 5 speed transmission, mileage 250,000 approx., single rear axle, 24.5 tires virgin, Holmes 750 wrecker, 25 ton extendable booms, outriggers, truck tow bar, custom white paint, aluminum front wheels, spoke on rear.



**NRC 40 ton**

Cecil Wilson, broker  
205-956-2852  
WWW.CECILWILSON.COM

1993 KW T-800 60" flat top sleeper, 435 - 475 HP, 9 speed over, 38,000 rears, air ride, red and white color, 1999 NRC 40 ton slider, w/3 stage underlift, 80,000 lb tow rating, Whelan strobe bar light.



**1985 25 Ton Aatac**

Cecil Wilson, broker  
205-956-2852  
WWW.CECILWILSON.COM

1987 KW T600 1985 25 TON AATAC, 350 cummins, BC Jakes, 9 speed OD, 60" sleeper, aluminum wheels, tires 90% approx, 278" WB, 142 CA, double framed, 170,000 miles approx on overhaul, mileage 1,096,000 approx, 1998 25 ton Aatac, forks, Chains, bus grids, 96" reach, 12,000 lb total extension.



**25 Ton Challenger**

Cecil Wilson, broker  
205-956-2852  
WWW.CECILWILSON.COM

**\$25,000**

1978 GMC GENERAL, 425 HP, 8V92 Detroit, 9 speed, 1983 25 ton Challenger, 1994 35,000 lb 3 stage NRC lift, Red and white color.  
**CHEAP PRICE**



**3 Car**

Cecil Wilson, broker  
205-956-2852  
WWW.CECILWILSON.COM

2005 M-2 FREIGHTLINER CENTURY 3 CAR 30 FT., Caterpillar C 7, Allison automatic, 33,000 GVW, air brake, 3 seats, 224105 miles approx. white color, Century 3 car, 30 ft w/Independent headboard, diamond floor, aluminum wheels.



**12 Ton Chevron**

Cecil Wilson, broker  
205-956-2852  
WWW.CECILWILSON.COM

1978 WESTERN STAR HOLMES 750 350 CUMMINS, 13 speed transmission, heavy tandems, new tires, aluminum wheels, 4 fuel tanks (500 gallons) heavy steel bumper, dual stacks, 40" sleeper, 158" CA, 25 ton 750 Holmes, square extendable booms, 30000 lb 3 stage hyd. Century underlift and Hyd spades, 3 Federal rotator lights.



**Air Brake**

Cecil Wilson, broker  
205-956-2852  
WWW.CECILWILSON.COM

2006 4300 IHC 12 TON CHEVRON, DT - 230 HP, 6 speed, extended cab, red color, air brake, 47,000 miles approx. Aluminum wheels 22.5, 2 - 55 gallon tanks, new tires, 2 tunnel boxes, air driver seat, 12 ton Chevron 12,000 lb winches, 6500 - 9000 wheel lift, truck tow bar.



**35 Ton Challenger**

Cecil Wilson, broker  
205-956-2852  
WWW.CECILWILSON.COM

1987 FREIGHTLINER, 1981 35 Ton Challenger, 3 stage boom, Zac 30 102" reach, 425 HP cat, jake brake, 13 speed Transmission, 60" sleeper, AC cold, tires 22.5, doubled framed, air ride, WB 288", new white paint, wheel lift 2 stage, 30,000 lb lift.



**25 Ton**

Cecil Wilson, broker  
205-956-2852  
WWW.CECILWILSON.COM

HOLMES 750, 25 ton wrecker only, squared extendable booms, winches and body in good condition, southern truck.



**New 25 Ton Jerr-Dan**

Cecil Wilson, broker  
205-956-2852  
WWW.CECILWILSON.COM

2003 KW T600 MID ROOF, NEW 25 TON JERR-DAN 12.7 Detroit, 430-470 HP, 10 speed, 545,000 miles approx, jake brake, 160 CA, 355 rear ratio, air ride, power windows, aluminum wheels 22.5 2 - 110 tanks, new 25 ton Jerrdan wireless remote, 8 functions, bus bars, forks, chain hook ups, spring hangers, 5th wheel and ball pental hook ups, extra long under reach, dual controls, trailer light bar and cord.



**35 Ton Vulcan**

Cecil Wilson, broker  
205-956-2852  
WWW.CECILWILSON.COM

2004 PETERBILT, 475 HP CAT, 62" sleeper, mileage 685000 approx., 10 speed, air ride, all aluminum wheels, White color, virgin tires 90% approx., 2008 V70 35 ton Vulcan, extra long under reach, bus bars, 6 sets of forks, Spring hangers, cord remote, aluminum body.



**2005 25 Ton Jerr-Dan**

Cecil Wilson, broker  
205-956-2852  
WWW.CECILWILSON.COM

1999 KENWORTH W-900 2005 25 TON JERR-DAN, 3406 cat, 475 HP, 10 speed, new yellow paint, tires 90% approx., 52,000 GVW, mileage 708,000 approx. DOT inspected, 25 ton Jerrdan, HDL-500-280 model, radio remote, totally equipped including tool box, 45,000 miles approx. on new bed.



**15,000lb Winches**

Cecil Wilson, broker  
205-956-2852  
WWW.CECILWILSON.COM

2000 6500 CHEVROLET, 149,000 miles approx., 3126 Cat 210 HP, 6 speed, new white paint, front tires new, rear 60% approx., Holmes 552 10 ton, 6500 - 9000 underreach lift, recent new cables, wheel lift cylinders rebuilt, truck tow bar, all new LED lights and simulators, AC cold, Microlock brake, push bumper, super clean inside and out.



**Holmes 750 25 ton**

Cecil Wilson, broker  
205-956-2852  
WWW.CECILWILSON.COM

1977 FREIGHTLINER HOLMES 750 25 TON, 350 cummins, 13 speed w/4 speed brownie second transmission, 340000 miles approx. Hendrickson suspension with timbren rubber locks, super cold AC, power steering, dual exhaust, double framed, All aluminum wheels, IIR-24.5 tires approx 50%, Holmes 750 25 ton extendable booms, Zac 20 97" reach, remote control, Bus bars, 4 sets of forks, spring hangers, 3 snatch blocks, jumper cables.



**16 TON**

Cecil Wilson, broker  
205-956-2852  
WWW.CECILWILSON.COM

**\$28,000**

1996 KODIAK, 6 CYL CAT, 5 + 2 TRANSMISSION, AIR BRAKES, 25,950 GVW, MILEAGE 137,000 TIRES SIZE 295-75 R-22.5, TIRES 50%, 180" WB, 118 CA, 16 TON AATAC W/ 15,000 LB WINCHES, 7/16" CABLE, TRUCK TOW BAR, WHELAN STROBE, NEW 2 STAGE UNDER REACH, 3 SETS OF FORKS.



**30 Ton**

Cecil Wilson, broker  
205-956-2852  
WWW.CECILWILSON.COM

**Recent Engine Overhaul**

1989 FLD FREIGHTLINER 94 CENTURY 5030T, 400 cummins, 15 speed, all aluminum wheels, white with gray, blue, and maroon stripes, 42 inch sleeper, 690,000 miles approx. 1994 Century 5030 T, 8 sets of forks, spring hangers, spade foot bads, chain hookups and Buss Bars.



**Nomar 2530 30 ton**

Cecil Wilson, broker  
205-956-2852  
WWW.CECILWILSON.COM

2001 KENWORTH T-800, 425 HP cat, 13 speed transmission, 688000 miles approx., loaded power windows, new turbo, New brakes, Nomar 2530 30 ton wrecker, bus bars, 4 sets of forks, all trailer hookups, southern truck - no rust.



**2006 335 Peterbilt**

Cecil Wilson, broker  
205-956-2852  
WWW.CECILWILSON.COM

2006 335 PETERBILT, cummins engine, 8 speed, air ride & air brakes, aluminum wheels, 22.5 tires, white color Mileage 205709 approx., 21 ft, steel Jerrdan diamond plate floor, aluminum blade side rails, Whelan strobe bar Light, 2 - 60" boxes.



**1991 Century 20 Ton**

Cecil Wilson, broker  
205-956-2852  
WWW.CECILWILSON.COM


1984 INTERNATIONAL 9400 EAGLE 1991 CENTURY 20 TON, 400 cummins, BC, Jakes, 13 speed over, 36" sleeper, 33,000 GVW, tires 80% approx, 262WB, new transmission in 2006, overhaul 150000 miles back, current inspection, 1991 Century 20 ton, formula 3 lift, Double framed, 6000 lb L arms, 84" extension, 137 CA, 10,000 extended, forks, chains, truck tow bar.



**V-30 16 Ton**

Cecil Wilson, broker  
205-956-2852  
WWW.CECILWILSON.COM

2006 FREIGHTLINER M-2 AUTOMATIC V-30 16 TON, Mercedes 250 HP, 80,000 miles approx. aluminum wheels, tires 75%, Vulcan V30 16 ton, Whelan strobe bar light w/ wing Whelan lights, large and small L arms system, 3 sets of forks, Spring hangers, chain in caps w/chains, red in color, super clean.



**Century 16 Ton**

Cecil Wilson, broker  
205-956-2852  
WWW.CECILWILSON.COM

**PRICE REDUCED**

1984 LTL 9000 FORD 1993 CENTURY 16 TON #3224, 400 Cummins engine w/jake, 13 speed, 560,000 miles approx, 2 air seats, 2 chrome stacks, Simulators, 33,000 GVW, 1992 - 2 16,000 lb winches 120 CA, 2 stage lift, 91" long, 12,000 extended, 24000 retracted, wire remote, 4 sets of forks, 6,000 lb grids, chain receivers and chains, steel body, mechanical Tilt, rotator light bar.



**New Holmes DTU 5th wheel wrecker**

Cecil Wilson, broker  
205-956-2852  
WWW.CECILWILSON.COM

NEW HOLMES DTU 5TH WHEEL WRECKER, sold but never used, ready for resale, 1 tool box, 20,000 lb winch, 3 sets of forks.



**Price Reduced**

Cecil Wilson, broker  
205-956-2852  
WWW.CECILWILSON.COM

**New 2007 75 Ton Century Rotaor**

NEW 2007 379 EXTENDED HOOD PETERBILT 75 TON CENTURY ROTATOR, 625 HP cat, 18 speed, factory spec truck, dual frame, triaxle, 372" wheelbase, 211" CA, 62" flat top sleeper, 11R 24.5 tires, 26,000 mileage approx., lite blue color, new century 75 ton rotator, 3 stage boom, 3 stage under reach 55,000 lb SDU -2 under reach, 135" reach, 3 - 50,000lb winches, 20" tunnel box.

# WWW.CECILWILSON.COM

# Mark's Classic Trucks

Mark Storer, founder of the Seattle area's Airport Towing and Burien Towing, bought his first antique tow truck in 1997. Today, The Storer Tow Truck Museum has 12 restored vehicles, and the public can get a look at them online.

The first truck Mark bought was a 1925 flatbed Model TT with a vintage towing unit, said Lynette Storer, Mark's wife who became president of the family business after his death. And the Model TT is still her favorite. In the 1920s, you couldn't buy a tow truck, she said. You bought a car or a truck and made it into a tow truck.

Mark carefully restored the Model TT, she said, and her father-in-law hand-planed the oak for the flatbed. "My husband loved his toys and when he got into something, he got into it all the way," she said.

Mark Storer was always looking for antique tow trucks. On a vacation to visit family in North Dakota, her husband detoured into South Dakota to look at a truck that was for sale. But Lynette

made her peace with her husband's passion a long time ago. "I got to see Mount Rushmore," she joked.

The antique tow trucks are stored in a warehouse that's also used for minor maintenance jobs, she said. Family members give tours to interested people.

About three years ago, their son Jared decided to photograph the trucks and make an antique tow truck calendar. Then Jared pitched the idea of putting photographs of all of the trucks online. His father liked the idea, and the online museum quickly found a home in cyberspace. "He just let me run with these projects," Jared Storer said.

Jared has moved the antique tow truck museum into the digital age, but his mother enjoys fond memories from a lower-tech time. The family would drive the antique trucks in Burien's annual Fourth of July parade, she said, and sometimes her husband took her out to Sunday lunch in one of the trucks.

To see the antique trucks online, go to [www.burientow.com/museum](http://www.burientow.com/museum)

## FAMILY MATTERS

continued from page 11

airplane's motor stalled, or the prop failed. The plane crashed. Mark and Brian were killed on impact.

Mark had always run an ethical business, Lynette said, and family members were actively involved in their community and church. But the outpouring of support overwhelmed her after the accident.

More than 700 people attended the memorial service, Lynette said. And the funeral procession included 47 tow trucks, three fire engines, and many other law enforcement vehicles. "It was rather amazing," she said.

### Pitching In

The company slowed down for a couple weeks after the accident, she said, but employees pitched in to keep the doors open. "Everyone who worked here stepped up," she said, "and I didn't hear one complaint." The company's dispatcher cancelled a vacation to help.

Her new son-in-law, who married her daughter just a month before the accident, left his job and started working full-time as the company's operations manager. Her son Jared had left the business to work as firefighter, but now he's back part-time. And she hired three people to cover the work Mark and Brian did.

Burien/Normandy Park Fire Department Chief Mike Mars wasn't surprised by the strong community response to the tragedy. He was out of town the day of the crash, and got a phone call telling him that Mark and Brian Storer had died. "I was shocked and saddened," he said. Mars said that Mark Storer was one of the community people he could go to and ask, "Can you help us out?"

The department holds an annual children's day, where it closes the roads around the station and sets up displays. Firefighters also do drills and safety demonstrations. Storer would donate old cars so the department could demonstrate extricating victims from them. Mark also brought some of his antique trucks to the event, Mars said.

But Mark died doing what he loved, Mars said. He got "the flying bug" five or six years ago. "He lived for it, it was his passion." His department put a fire truck in the funeral procession to honor the Storers, he said.

### Moving On

Lynette said she plans to keep running the business the way her husband ran it. "We're fair," she said. "We don't have the highest price or the lowest price. We look at what it costs us."

And she plans to keep trying to offer a good working environment to her

See FAMILY MATTERS, page 18



1929 Model A and Mark's first Cessna airplane

1933 Ford hotrod

Brian in a Santa suit in our 1935 Chevrolet

This 1937 Dodge Brothers tow truck was featured at the International Towing Museum for some years before Mark purchased it

Mark promised General Manager Daryl that he would give him this 1935 Ford hotrod if he ever died. Daryl is now the proud owner, but he still parks it with the rest of the antiques at the Storer Museum.

1925 Ford Model TT



## ROLLING IN THE DOUGH

continued from page 14

- **Labor cost-to-revenue (total annual payroll and benefits/total annual revenues):** This is another of Coe's recommended ratios. It is critical because labor is the highest expense item in a towing business. Paying close attention to this ratio will reveal the impact on value of otherwise hidden problems, like employee turnover. "Turnover is probably the single most expensive line item," said Coe, "and the one most difficult to really see, since there are so many variable costs involved in the process."

### Debt's Value

Generally, it is better to have more stockholder's equity and less debt in a towing business. While this is true for the long term, there are many cases in which you can build more value by taking on more debt.

Nearly all towing business owners will require some bank debt at some point in the life cycle of the business. This can be a line of credit to provide working capital to finance accounts receivable or a loan on a new truck to meet the growing demands of an expanding customer list. The key factor in deciding whether or not to take on more debt is to do a cost/benefit analysis. Let's look at two examples:



**Example 1:** Let's say you are currently turning away \$10,000 per month in towing business because all of your trucks are at full capacity. You can purchase a new truck for \$50,000 with a debt payment of \$780 per month (8% loan with a seven-year payback).

You calculate that it will cost another \$5,000 per month to operate the truck. The total cost is \$5,780, but the total benefit is \$10,000 per month. In this case, you can certainly justify the increased debt load to purchase the truck in terms of adding value to your business.

**Example 2:** You have an opportunity to land a big account at a tight profit margin. The account requires adding at least one more truck and increasing your line of credit to fund the increase in receivables because the new customer demands 60-day terms.

You calculate your annual potential monthly revenue to be \$6,500. You calculate the inclusive cost to run the truck at \$5,780 (as in the first example) per month and the monthly interest expense increase on the line of credit to be \$1,500.

In this case, the costs would outweigh the benefits. You should either ask for a higher price to take on the business (and the corresponding debt) or pass.

### V.I.P. Employees

An often-overlooked way to build value in a towing business is with your employees. Competent, loyal employees build a lot of value in a business by improving the efficiency of the towing company and by building good, long-term relationships with loyal customers. There are several key steps to ensuring that your employees are building value in your towing business.

- **Hire well.** Coe said that bad hires are very costly. Owners should do an extensive amount of homework before hiring. Take the time to check references and work history. It is also advisable to enforce a policy of drug testing if you don't already have one.

- **Deal with problem employees.** When an employee is causing problems because of a bad attitude, a weak work ethic, or deficiencies in skills, you need to deal head-on with employee issues. Document the issues and give the employee a chance to improve. If the problem persists, replace the employee.

- **Develop loyal, competent employees.** Keep up with market pay rates, offer market-level benefits, and treat your people with respect and professionalism. "Be a leader and an inspiring person to work for," said Coe.

- **Train your employees.** Well-trained employees are a huge competitive advantage, Coe pointed out. "Train, train, train your people on excellent customer service," she stated. "This is a factor that sets one business apart dramatically from its competitors. Train drivers for safe, efficient operation and pride in the career."

### In The Long Run

Having your towing business survive your ownership is the ultimate indicator that you have succeeded in preserving the long-term value of your operation. The value you have built will be most evident when you either pass along the company to the next generation or sell it outright to an independent buyer.

See ROLLING IN THE DOUGH, page 18

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**FAMILY MATTERS**

continued from page 16

employees. From the beginning, she said, the Storers paid their drivers at least a living wage. As the business grew, so did employee benefits, she said. Now the package includes sick and vacation leave, a health insurance plan, and profit-sharing.

And she'll continue to require drivers to wear uniforms. "We want to be a professional company. We're not a wrecking yard," she said. The company likely will continue to thrive, she said, and attributed its success so far to hard

**"He lived for it, it was his passion"**

work and Mark's "entrepreneurial spirit."

"We're all just really committed and we've been here a long time," she said. ❖

**ROLLING IN THE DOUGH**

continued from page 17

**"Watch your profitability like a hawk"**

"It is important to build equity in a business. Otherwise, the owner is just buying himself a job," said Coe. "In order to be a viable, marketable asset, it must stand on its own and be able to support a manager who would take the place of the owner after sale."

Being vigilant is your best chance to build long-term value for the next owner, said Coe, who has seen many towing businesses successfully change ownership. "Watch your profitability like a hawk," she said. "Make changes as needed, don't delay. Diversify by minimizing low-pay club work so that it does not exceed 25 percent of total towing volume. Call on customers. Build relationships. Keep adding new business. Develop a presence in the community so that you have the highest possible amount of general retail calls. These are, or should be, the best paying."

Building value certainly doesn't come easy. However, by focusing on establishing a stable customer base, developing employees, making a profit with the earnings retained in the business, and building management succession, you can ensure the long-term viability of your business. ❖

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- Walking can add minutes to your life. This enables you at 85 years old to spend an additional five months in a nursing home at \$7000 per month.
- My uncle started walking five miles a day when he was 60. Now he's 97 years old and we don't know where he is.
- I like long walks, especially when they are taken by people who annoy me.
- I have to walk early in the morning, before my brain figures out what I'm doing.
- I joined a health club last year, spent about 400 bucks. Haven't lost a pound. Apparently you have to go there.
- Every time I hear the dirty word "exercise," I wash my mouth out with chocolate.
- I do have flabby thighs. Fortunately my stomach covers them.
- The advantage of exercising every day is so when you die, they'll say, "Well, he looks good, doesn't he?"
- If you are going to try cross-country skiing, start with a small country.
- I got a lot of exercise just by going over the hill in the last few years.
- We all get heavier as we get older, because there's a lot more information in our heads.
- Every time I start thinking too much about how I look, I just find a happy hour and by the time I leave, I look just fine.



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- Know your cost of doing business
- Never sign a contract without an accountant's review
- Pay attention to the needs of your customer base
- Approach the purchase of assets conservatively
- Know how to say "No!" to unprofitable situations

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## TOW PROS

# Man Of Action

*This towman has done it all, much of it to help others*

By Thomas G. Dolan

In a hands-on industry like towing, J.R. Bramlett of Illinois' Airline Towing knows that learning something new every day comes with the territory. In fact, his willingness to try new things has led to much of his success during his 42 years in the business.



J.R. Bramlett (left) with one of his employees at the 2005 Illinois Tow Show

Bramlett, 65, did not come from a towing background. He was born and raised in Mississippi in a family of 10 children: eight boys and two girls. He was the seventh son. At age 15, he joined the state's National Guard and, two years later, went into the U.S. Army at 17 years old.

Upon his discharge, he went to work for BorgWarner Corporation, an international manufacturer of automotive parts and a general contractor for the military, at their plant in Chicago, Illinois. His older brother, Paul, worked there as a mail clerk and Bramlett had briefly worked there as a shipping clerk before his military service.

At BorgWarner, Bramlett became instrumental in helping to replace the

existing union group with the International Union of the United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America (UAW). He became UAW Chapter 333 president at age 21.

### No Looking Back

During this period, Bramlett began a three-year stint as a police officer while attending law school in the evening. He also started towing during the colder part of the year. "I found a tow truck under a tree, fixed it up, and started doing service calls, jump-starts, and pull-outs," he recalled. "In about four months time, I had made about \$30,000. At that time, policemen were making about \$6,000 to \$8,000 and lawyers \$16,000 to \$21,000 a year. I was making more than three times that."

In 1967, Bramlett decided that towing was the only way to go and never looked back. In his first full-time year, he said he made \$130,000, adding, "It was clear to me that I wasn't going to take a \$100,000 cut in pay to become a lawyer!"

His business grew from one to three trucks and, thanks to his hobby as a racer in the local demolition derby, he



One of Airline Towing's tow trucks on display at the 2005 Illinois show



Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley with J.R. Bramlett in the early 1990s

acquired more work for himself: getting rid of all the wrecks at the track. "We had to make the drivers give us the titles before they raced; otherwise we'd never be able to get rid of all that junk," he said. "There would be 15 to 30 wrecks a night, which I got for salvage. I did extremely well."

By 1974, at age 31, he continued expanding his company, J & R Towing. In one year, he said, he purchased seven other towing companies and became one of the largest operators in the Chicago area.

In 1978, Bramlett bought his first helicopter and became one of the first in the industry to utilize one in the business. Later, he bought another helicopter and leased two fixed-wing aircraft. He and one other employee were trained and served as the company's pilots, using the aircraft for vehicle search, recoveries from the air, and related purposes.

Bramlett involved his company in a variety of work. "All kinds," he related, "light duty, heavy duty, ATVs, forklifts, rubber tire loaders, and Bobcats." He also became a preferred service provider for several insurance companies, which involved him in a variety of jobs, including transport and airplane crash recoveries.

### A New Start

Then, in 1980, Bramlett had had enough. He was burned out at age 37 and sold his 30-truck business. "I was not giving myself any time off," he said. "I was working seven days a week, around the clock. You get into the push and shove of it, and you get so you can't think straight. You need good trucks and drivers. I did stay on top of that. But I wasn't smart enough to give myself some rest."

But one year later, he was back in action. The man who had purchased the company and leased his trucks and equipment had gone bankrupt. Bramlett stepped in and took the business back over.

To avoid legalities with the old company name, Bramlett called his startup Airline Towing, Inc. because he was still doing aircraft crash recoveries and

transports for the insurance companies.

This time, he began with five trucks but soon worked back up to 30. It took

## Incidents Of Interest

*Airline Towing has had its share*

Airline Towing does all kinds of recovery work, said owner J.R. Bramlett, including the most difficult, such as train wrecks, airplane crashes, and water recoveries. He described a few of his company's more unusual challenges:

- "A lot of drug dealers run their cars into Lake Michigan and we pull them out, with the drugs still in them, but it's not as bad as it used be."
- In December 2007, Airline Towing was called by the Illinois State Police to coordinate a major water recovery effort as part of the well-known Stacy Peterson murder case. During a three-day recovery, Airline pulled a semi, 16 cars, and a motorcycle from a body of water for investigators looking for evidence.
- During the mid-1980s, Bramlett once recovered more than 400 new cars that had been stolen, most from the Ford Motor Company. His company helped locate 26 of them at one time while doing a search by air from his helicopter. "We found them in the woods," he said.
- In 1996, he was called by an insurance company to do a helicopter recovery in the Grand Canyon where a car with the body still in it was hanging from a tree three-quarters of a mile down. "We cut the car in two and brought it out in two pieces," Bramlett said.

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<b>2006 Ford F550</b> , Diesel, Auto, XLT Dynamic 701 BDW	<b>2002 Ford F450</b> , Diesel, Auto, XLT Dynamic 701 BDW	

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him a couple of years, he said, to get the police calls back, but continues to do a variety of work. However, he no longer owns helicopters due to the expense of upkeep. He just leases one as needed.

**Industry Involvement**

During his four decades in the towing and recovery industry, Bramlett has been actively involved with the Professional Towing and Recovery Association of Illinois (PTROI) and the Towing & Recovery Association of America (TRAA).

Bill Howard, who owns Naperville Towing Service, is the current PTROI president and has known for Bramlett for more than 20 years. "Officers of our association are not paid for their service," he said. "The office of president can be very rigorous and time-consuming. J.R. has served three two-year terms as president." Howard added that the length of time Bramlett has been in business in this industry is testament to his work ethic.

According to Bramlett, making money in the industry has not been a problem over the years. "The only real slow-down I've noticed was after 9/11 when the government shut down the airlines for two weeks, so people stopped driving," he said. "Buses and trains picked up some, but not much. That had an effect on the industry, but wasn't that noticeable with us."

Generally, "a down economy is good for us," he said. "People drive more, working longer hours to make ends

meet. They drink more, commit more crimes, and that gives us more business. We're like undertakers in bad times."

The biggest change in the industry that has impacted Bramlett has been the cost of equipment. "I can tell you one thing, back in 1967 I could buy a new light-duty tow truck for \$3,500. Today, the same truck costs \$75,000," he said. "Then, a heavy-duty truck sold from \$30,000 to \$50,000. Now a 70-tonner will cost \$500,000."

**Downtime Diversions**

Bramlett and his wife, Judith, have a son and two grandchildren. Son Brian, who followed in his dad's footsteps by joining the Army, recently returned from serving in Iraq.

In his downtime, Bramlett travels with Judith, likes to deep-sea fish off the Florida coast, and enjoys watching the Chicago Bears' football games and the Chicago White Sox's baseball games.

Bramlett also said he has "a little hobby" of donating fire engines and squad cars and, recently, a tornado warning system to little towns in North Mississippi as a way of giving back and paying tribute to where he grew up. He's also taken on a secondary business of purchasing and developing lots in his Orland Park, Illinois neighborhood.

Though Bramlett said he thinks about retiring or semi-retiring these days, it's probably one new thing he's not quite ready to try. ❖

# A Giving Man



An Ecru, Mississippi official (left) with J.R. Bramlett beside the fire truck that Bramlett donated to the town

J.R. Bramlett has worked to help others in several capacities. Here are some examples:

- Bill Rutledge, the mayor of the city/county of Pontotoc, Mississippi where J.R. grew up, sent him a letter in December 2006 to thank him for giving a "fire aerial" truck and seven police cars since 2002. The community made him an honorary police officer. Rutledge also thanked him for the personal touring bus that JR turned into a portable medical clinic for victims of Hurricane Katrina.
- *Daily Southtown* columnist Phil Kadner did a 9/11/05 story about J.R.

and the tour bus (formerly belonging to entertainer Wayne Newton), which J.R. himself took to New Orleans to help the Katrina victims. One of his drivers went with him.

- In the fall of 2008, J.R. gave a new police car and siren/weather alert to the town of Thaxton in Pontotoc County, Mississippi. He has given more than 20 fire trucks and squad cars to Pontotoc City and surrounding municipalities.
- J.R. was nominated to the International Towing Hall of Fame and Museum in December

— Cyndi Kight

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## TOW TRAINING

# Training Days

*Helping create a firm foundation  
for new drivers*

By Cyndi Kight

There's one life lesson that Dave Lambert, president of the North American Towing Academy, has taken to heart over the years: When one door closes, another opens up. Long before he became involved with tow trucks, Lambert was interested in other types of vehicles, namely aircraft.

The Hammond, LA native joined the Air Force in 1969 and spent almost seven years as an air traffic controller. In 1976, he became an air traffic controller for the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), assigned to work the air traffic in and around Jacksonville, FL.

Then, on August 5, 1981, then-president Ronald Reagan fired 11,000 air traffic controllers who had gone on strike. One of them was Lambert.

### Dream Job

In the wake of losing his career, Lambert went back to college and took on a variety of jobs to make ends meet. "You do what you have to do when you have a one-year-old and a relatively new marriage," he said. In addition to being a t-shirt artist, a courier driver, and a sewer line worker, Lambert found a job as a full-time tow truck driver for a Jacksonville company.

Six years later, after graduating with his bachelor's degree in business administration, Lambert was hired by AAA as a field representative in 1987. In 1989, he became the editor of AAA national's Towing and Service Manual.

"For a tower, writing the towing manual was a dream job," Lambert said. "My main job there was to develop towing procedures and publishing them." Working directly with automobile manufacturers, he had the opportunity to drive nearly every new model, sometimes before they were sold to the public. On several

occasions, he noted, the tow testing was done with a cover over the vehicle so the public and other manufacturers couldn't see it.

### Trainer's Training

At the beginning of his work on the manual, Lambert attended his first light-duty training program, receiving a certification from the University of Georgia's International Institute of Towing and Recovery (IITR).

"Training was rare back then. You learned by your mistakes," he said. "I took the course to expand my knowledge of the towing industry." It was there, Lambert said, that he began to realize how much there was to know about towing that his time behind the wheel had never taught him. And, considering how many recoveries he had done without a snatch block, Lambert added, he also regarded himself as lucky to still be alive.

While at AAA, Lambert became the assistant to the chairman of the Society of Automotive Engineers or SAE Towability Committee for several years. He served as the committee's chair for one year himself, and later assisted the towing industry on a national level. According to Harriet Cooley, executive director of the Towing and Recovery Association of America, Lambert proof-read the TRAA Level 1 Study Guide in 1995.

Lambert also began presenting seminars at tow shows and contributing safety articles for industry publications in the early 1990s. According to Lambert, he developed a light-duty certification program for AAA in 2001. He also wrote the "train-the-trainer" program for new instructors and served as an instructor for both programs for three years.

In 2003, the Professional Wrecker Operators of Florida (PWF) hired him as the light- and medium-duty instructor for their association training and certification program. "He was certainly a qualified person," said Mike Seamon, PWF's executive director. "We wouldn't have that long-term relationship if he wasn't."

### Enhanced Learning

Lambert's life and work took a new direction when he parted ways with AAA. In January of 2004, he debuted his own light-duty training



Towers in training with Dave Lambert

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### TowBlog

Where You Find What You Need To Know

# One Smart Dog

A man is driving around the back woods of Tennessee when he sees this sign in front of a broken-down old house: "Talking Dog For Sale." He goes to the house and asks the owner about the dog. The owner tells him the dog is in the backyard. The man goes into the backyard and sees a Labrador retriever sitting there.

"Do you talk?" he asks.

"Yep," the Lab replies.

After the guy recovers from the shock of hearing the dog talk, he continues, "So, please, tell me your story."

The Lab replies, "Well, I discovered that I could talk when I was pretty young. Later, I decided I wanted to help the government, so I went to the CIA. In no time at all they had me jetting from country to country, sitting in rooms with spies and world leaders, because no one figured a dog would be eavesdropping.

"I was one of their most valuable spies for eight years running. But the jetting around really tired me out, and I knew I wasn't getting any younger so I decided to settle down. I signed up for a job at the airport to do some undercover security, wandering near

suspicious characters and listening in. I uncovered some incredible dealings and was awarded a batch of medals.

"Finally, I got married, had a mess of puppies, and now I'm retired."

The man is amazed. He goes back in and asks the owner what he wants for this remarkable dog.

"Ten dollars," the owner says.

"Ten dollars?!" exclaimed the man.

"This dog is amazing! Why on earth are you selling him so cheap?"

"Because he's a liar. He never did any of that crap."



## “Training was rare back then”

venture. The North American Towing Academy (NATA) is based in Lambert's hometown of Altamonte Springs, FL, just outside Orlando.

“I felt there were pieces missing in the other programs,” said Lambert, who is 60. “With my own company, I could fill in those gaps. It was also important for the programs to be cost-effective to the class sponsors or to the individual tower.” The NATA's logo is a white knight chess piece, a symbol of helping people, explained Lambert.

This past summer, Lambert expanded his company's training repertoire with the addition of a heavy-duty program led by instructor Garrett Paquette. Lambert also purchased the PWO's training division and increased the number of classes offered.

“NATA programs are built to lay out a firm foundation for new drivers,” said Lambert, “and each class, from light to heavy, will challenge even the most experienced operator.” In addition to hands-on training, he said, the combination of a professional PowerPoint presentation and videos in the classroom enhances the learning experience.

### Up To Speed

In October, the New Hampshire Towing Association sponsored a NATA light- and medium-duty class for its members. Rene Fortin, who has served as the organization's president for 35 years, said that they have hosted a number of training sessions over the years, including those offered by Ross Kinman in the 1970s, Tom Luciano, Joe Sroga and WreckMaster.

“David has set up a good program,” said Fortin. He described Lambert as a patient instructor who makes sure that all attendees are up to speed during each section. Lambert's agenda is well-established, said Fortin, and it progresses through all of the needs of the industry. Additionally, the NATA program provides everything required by the New Hampshire State Police, said Fortin, adding, “He is one of the accepted trainers for the state of New Hampshire.”

During the two-day session held over a weekend in Loudon, New Hampshire, Fortin said that there were eight to 10 hours of classroom instruction and eight to 10 hours of actual application.


“We're pleased with his presentations,” said Fortin, especially the nearly one dozen situations set up outdoors by Lambert. “His hands-on sessions are realistic situations,” Fortin

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## MANAGING MATTERS

# Hidden Profits

*How your impound yard can yield unexpected benefits*

By James M. Weaver

Wouldn't it be nice to own a low-cost cash cow like a tollbooth? Well, most tow operations do own a profit center that is a lot like a tollbooth because lots of vehicles pass through it. You may not realize it, but if you have an impound/storage lot, you own one of the most profitable aspects of a tow operation.

Run the numbers and you'll quickly see that the vehicles sitting in your fenced-in lot are great moneymakers, whether collecting fees or becoming your property. Let's just say you have 50 vehicles in your lot collecting just \$15 a day — that's \$750 a day in your pocket! If you have 200 vehicles, it's \$3,000 a day! Talk about a cash cow!

Unfortunately, it's a given in this business that you won't be paid storage for each and every vehicle in your lot, but if you pay attention to what's going on in your lot, you're still going to make a great profit.

The key to making more money? Tracking the vehicles in your lot.

### A Profit Center

Let's take the example we used above: With 200 vehicles in your lot bringing in \$3,000 a day, you're looking at \$90,000 per month or \$1,080,000 per year! Assuming monthly operating costs of \$1,000, this translates to a gross profit of \$1,068,000 per year.

This is equivalent to charging \$2,670,000 in towing fees with 40 percent gross profit. In other words, at \$75 a tow, your company would have to make an additional 35,600 calls each year to realize the same profit!

Obviously, no one's lot is always at full capacity, but we can all agree that the income potential is high. The money is literally sitting in your lot just waiting to be made or lost, and this is why it's so important to establish the sort of processes and procedures that will allow you to run it properly.

### The Laugh List II

## Fun With Puns

- Two vultures board an airplane, each carrying two dead raccoons. The flight attendant looks at them and says, "I'm sorry, gentlemen, only one carrion allowed per passenger."
- Two boll weevils grew up in South Carolina. One went to Hollywood and became a famous actor. The other stayed behind in the cotton fields and never amounted to much. The second one, naturally, became known as the lesser of two weevils.
- Two Eskimos sitting in a kayak were chilly, but when they lit a fire in the craft, it sank, proving once again that you can't have your kayak and heat it, too.
- A three-legged dog walks into a saloon in the Old West. He slides up to the bar and announces: "I'm looking for the man who shot my paw."
- Did you hear about the Buddhist who refused Novocain during a root canal? He wanted to transcendental medication.
- A group of chess enthusiasts checked into a hotel and were standing in the lobby discussing their recent tournament victories. After about an hour, the manager came out of the office and asked them to disperse. "But why?" they asked, as they moved off. "Because," he said, "I can't stand chess nuts boasting in an open foyer."
- A woman has twins and gives them up for adoption. One of them goes to a family in Egypt and is named "Ahmal." The other goes to a family in Spain; they name him "Juan." Years later, Juan sends a picture of

himself to his birth mother. Upon receiving the picture, she tells her husband that she wishes she also had a picture of Ahmal. Her husband responds, "They're twins! If you've seen Juan, you've seen Ahmal."

- Some friars were behind on their belfry payments, so they opened up a small florist shop to raise funds. Since everyone liked to buy flowers from the men of God, a rival florist across town thought the competition was unfair. He asked the good fathers to close down, but they would not. He went back and begged the friars to close. They ignored him. So, the rival florist hired Hugh MacTaggart, the roughest and most vicious thug in town to "persuade" them to close. Hugh beat up the friars and trashed their store, saying he'd be back if they didn't close up shop. Terrified, they did so, thereby proving that Hugh, and only Hugh, can prevent florist friars.
- Mahatma Gandhi, as you know, walked barefoot most of the time, which produced an impressive set of calluses on his feet. He also ate very little, which made him rather frail and with his odd diet, he suffered from bad breath. This made him...what? (Oh man, this is so bad, it's good) A super-calloused fragile mystic hexed by halitosis.
- And finally, there was the person who sent ten different puns to friends, with the hope that at least one of the puns would make them laugh. Unfortunately, no pun in ten did.



There's more to this than it looks

As an independent profit center, your lot should be run as a business, but too many companies lack the time, the effort, and the focus required to realize the sort of profits they could be making. The key is to work smarter not harder. But how? The following three steps are a smart place to start:

- Clean Up Your Lot
- Keep Up With Your Lot
- Make People Accountable For Your Lot

### Clean Up

If you want to turn your lot into a profit center, start by cleaning up both the physical lot and the paper trail you use to track vehicles and profits.

When asked how many vehicles they have in their lot, some owners can respond with, "213 vehicles as of last night," but most owners confess, "I really don't know." Which type of company are you? Which type do you think is maximizing the profit potential of their impound lot?

Where do you begin this clean-up? Start by printing out a list of the vehicles you think you have in your lot. Then have someone you trust go out and find each and every vehicle. Are there vehicles in the lot that are not in your records? Are there vehicles in your records that are not in the lot?

Some of you may be thinking that this sounds like too much work, but remember that there are profits to be made or lost. A Chinese proverb tells us that "A journey of a thousand miles is half done with the first step." Cleaning up your lot is the step that will start you moving toward profit rather than away from it.

### Keep Up

Once you have a good handle on exactly what you have in your lot, it's important to keep up with it and to keep your records straight. Keeping up with your lot means knowing what vehicles are in the lot, where they are in the lot, and how long they've been there. This is a very important step if you want to make the money you deserve.

Too many business owners are willing to settle for what's left instead of what they actually have coming. Losing money is easy, if you don't pay attention to your lot. There are so many ways that the money can slip through the gate and down the drain. A partial list would include:

- Getting stuck with junk vehicles (insurance burns as an example)
- Needing an overflow lot because your primary lot is full
- Not getting paid for storage because the paperwork was not filed properly
- Spending too much on labor in tracking the vehicle from start to finish
- Damage claims
- Theft claims for personal items
- Unauthorized discounts
- Undocumented discounts and leases

### It's No Joke

The cartoon is one that many of us can relate to. When a customer calls about a vehicle, it's important that your tow operation can find the vehicle in a timely manner without requiring you to spend a lot of time, energy, and pay-

See MANAGING MATTERS, page 25

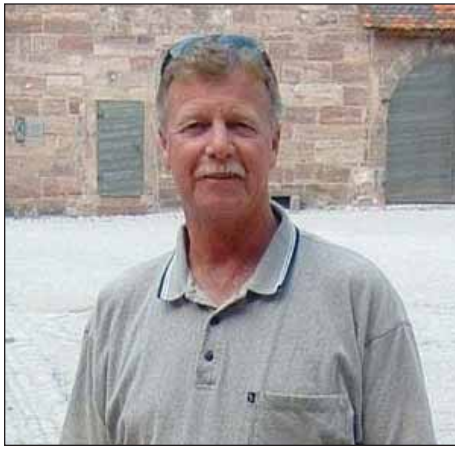


"DO YOU HAVE MY RED CAR?"



**TOW TRAINING**

continued from page 23



NATA's Dave Lambert

noted. "It isn't just a quick thing of walking out and talking about it." He added, "Certification seems to be what's coming. Might as well be ahead of it."

**Challenges Ahead**

In addition to the light-, medium- and heavy-duty classes, Lambert said, NATA offers a train-the-trainer class and a program to help association members pass the TRAA Level 1 and 2 exams. With the exception of the train-the-trainer class, all programs are two-day sessions that are followed by the NATA certification testing. Though most of the NATA classes have been held on sites in the Northeast, Lambert said, "I'm willing to go any place, anywhere they can get 15 towers together."

Prior to the economic downturn, Lambert said that he saw driver retention as the industry's biggest trial. Currently, he said, finding drivers probably isn't on the top of that list; now it's finding business. For the NATA, Lambert said, the main concern right now is expanding the heavy-duty program nationally and building an ultra-heavy-duty class.

"One of these days, in the not-so-distant future, certification will become the norm," said Lambert. "In my life, many doors to new opportunities have opened soon after other doors closed. My latest challenges are to help towers become safer, help businesses prosper, and to know the NATA is contributing to the industry."

In his downtime, Lambert enjoys golf and riding his Harley. He has been married to his wife, Jean, for 31 years and has a 28-year old son, Sean, and a 22-year-old daughter, Courtney.

Learn more about the NATA at [www.thenata.com](http://www.thenata.com) or by contacting Lambert at [jdavelambert@aol.com](mailto:jdavelambert@aol.com) or 407-765-5149.

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**MANAGING MATTERS**

continued from page 24

roll looking for that vehicle, particularly when you can't say for certain whether or not that vehicle is even in your lot. This unneeded expenditure of

**"Cleaning up  
your lot will  
start you moving  
toward profit"**

time is a direct expense, and it takes profit from your bottom line every day.

When a customer calls about a car you can't find, you'll probably tell them to call back with the VIN number or license plate. Even in a best-case scenario, this results in your employee taking additional time on a second phone call when the customer finally calls back.

The more likely scenario? Your employee spends even more time handling an irate customer who can't understand why it's so difficult for you to find the car. With a better process, your company can deal with customers in a more efficient manner, allowing both you and the customer a better experience.

**Job Accountability**

It doesn't matter what size your operation is, every impound lot has certain jobs that need to be done. Break down the jobs, make job descriptions for each position, and assign someone to each job. You'll be much happier with the results when every person in your operation knows exactly what they're accountable for.

In smaller companies, one person may fill several roles, while larger operations may require a separate person for each position. Job functions for a typical operation will include the following personnel:

- Lot Manager
- Lot Attendant
- Title Clerk
- Abandoned Vehicle Clerk
- Damage Claims Manager

You'll need to build a detailed job description for each position. Spend some time thinking of all the different



Jim Weaver

actions you may have to take with a vehicle. Some vehicles may only sit in your lot for a few hours and require only a minimum amount of paperwork. But what about vehicles that stay longer? Will you need to obtain owner information? Contact the police department? Personal property release? Vehicles on hold? The list goes on.

Think of every step that may need to be taken. Then write them down. At each step of the process, think: "What happens next?" Letter sent? Letter returned? Apply for title? Auction? Junk?

Determine who will be responsible for each of these steps, and ensure that they know when each step needs to be taken. Build a process, build a procedure, and assign someone to be resp-

onsible then manage, manage, manage. You cannot manage what you cannot measure.

When you run your lot as a profit center, it can become a tollbooth, generating profits that will go into your pockets and not out the gate and down the drain.

*Jim Weaver is the founder and CEO of Tracker Management Systems, Inc., a software company that has been helping tow operations improve their bottom line for more than 20 years. He has presented management seminars and written feature management articles for nearly 30 years. For more information, visit [www.trackermanagement.com](http://www.trackermanagement.com) or contact Weaver at [jim@trackermanagement.com](mailto:jim@trackermanagement.com)*

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## TOW DOCTOR

# Asleep At The Wheel

*Dealing with the danger of driving drowsy*

By Teresa Moore, M.D.

Often the vehicles towed have been wrecked because of excessive speed or driver impairment. The latter is usually considered to be related to the use of alcohol or illicit drugs. Unfortunately, what often gets overlooked is the effect of fatigue or drowsiness in many motor vehicle accidents.

You don't even see the results of most of these accidents as they go unreported because of legal and insurance reasons. Because of this, the statistics revealing the true effect of sleep impairment on motor vehicle accidents are grossly minimized.

Sleep deprivation or drowsiness causes slowed reaction times as well as decreased awareness, which can be deadly at the wheel. Couple this with the fact that sleep deprivation also increases the effect of alcohol in a person's system. Fortunately, because most truck operators are aware of the risks of driving while under the influence of alcohol, the industry has a very low incidence of intoxicated drivers compared with the general population.

### Rested Enough?

But we really don't know the true impact of falling asleep at the wheel in the general population or in truck operators. Just consider whether you are rested enough to get behind that wheel. If you are sleep deprived and have a blood alcohol level (BAL) within legal limits, your driving abilities actually may be more impaired than someone who has adequately rested but has a BAL over the legal limit.

Drowsiness at the wheel also increases the chances of a high-speed collision. When a driver has fallen asleep at the wheel, many times there are no skid marks at the scene, indicating that the driver made no attempt to slow or stop the vehicle.

According to the website for the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), "Truck drivers face a disproportionately high risk for fatal crash-related injuries..." and noted that the 2004 fatality rate for heavy-duty and tractor-trailer truck drivers is 48.2 per 100,000 workers, which is 11 times greater than the average worker's risk. Although the exact reason for this



Jon Hallock

increased risk is unknown, the article cited that some research suggests an association with job-related fatigue.

### Sleepy Drivers

What increases any long-haul truck driver or tow truck operator's chance of falling asleep at the wheel? The first thing that usually comes to mind is lack of sleep. Even if a towing operator has worked all day and half the night recovering vehicles, he may have to work the next day also.

Though there are federal and state regulations for total daily hours that can be worked and another limit for hours driven, there are contradicting postings about whether these regulations are followed or enforced. Shifts greater than 17 hours and irregular shifts have been shown to increase drowsiness while driving.

Many medications also cause drowsiness as a side effect. Most muscle relaxers, antidepressants, anxiolytics, and narcotic pain medications list sedation as a side effect. Common over-the-counter medications that include sedating antihistamines such as diphenhydramine have been shown to cause more impairment and sedation than alcohol. Even some blood pressure medications list drowsiness as a side effect. When medications causing drowsiness are taken by someone who is already sleep deprived, even more sedation may occur than is usual.

### Sleep Apnea

One of the most often overlooked causes for falling asleep at the wheel is obstructive sleep apnea. Obstructive sleep apnea is a condition characterized by periods of time in which a person stops breathing while sleeping resulting in a decreased level of oxygen circulating in the blood. When the oxygen level drops, sleep is disturbed even if the person is not aware of it.

Symptoms of this include loud snoring, chronic daytime fatigue even after seven to nine hours of nightly sleep, and periods of time in which the person periodically stops breathing while sleeping. Causes of sleep apnea include being overweight or obese. Lifestyle issues such as frequently eating

fat-laden fast food and getting little exercise may pack on the pounds and increase a tower's chance of developing obstructive sleep apnea. This condition is easily diagnosed with a sleep study.

There are several options for treatment including continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP). Research has shown that sleep apnea is one of the most common reasons that a driver becomes impaired and that treatment with CPAP returns the person's abilities to that of a driver without sleep apnea.

### Prevention Steps

While there is no substitute for adequate sleep on a nightly basis, episodic drowsiness may improve with catnaps of 20 to 30 minutes. Longer naps, however, may leave you feeling more sleepy or cause insomnia when you do have an opportunity to sleep.

Caffeine, other over-the-counter stimulants, and energy drinks may also give you a temporary improvement in your alertness, though I could find no research indicating that they improved a driver's reaction time or lessened accidents from drowsy driving. Caffeine and other stimulants may also cause insomnia, palpitations, and elevated blood pressure. Over time, the stimulant effect wears off and is less effective in perking you up.

Most important, if you feel too sleepy to drive, then don't drive. Think of the vehicles you have had to tow after the driver fell asleep.

Awareness of the issue is the first step. If you don't know there is a problem, you can't fix it. Once you realize there is a problem, you can be part of the solution. There is current research being done to quantify the true impact of sleeping at the wheel. If you are interested in participating, you may contact NIOSH; they are planning to conduct a baseline survey at 40 truck stops across the nation.

See the Drowsy Driving website ([www.drowsydriving.org](http://www.drowsydriving.org)) sponsored by the National Sleep Foundation. Employers may download a brochure titled "Work-related Roadway Crashes: Prevention Strategies for Employers" at <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2004-136/default.html>



Walt Phillips

***"The paint job helps on my nighttime repos"***

## HAULING HISTORY

# Orange Gem

*This 1970 tow truck was much admired at auction*

By John Gunnell

"You get lots of looks when you drive an old tow truck like this one," said Steve McShane at the 2008 Atlantic City Classic Car Auction.

McShane and his partner, Michael Horstmann, are the owners of a collector car dealership called Premiere Motor Cars, Inc. in Levitt-



This 1970 Chevy tow truck towed a 1970 Pontiac to the auction

town, PA. A friend of theirs purchased the 1970 Chevrolet C40 one-and-a-half-ton tow truck from Lankford Buick, a Buick-Pontiac-GMC dealer located in Conshohocken, PA. Lankford is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year. A plate from the dealership is still affixed to the truck's Holmes wrecker boom.

"Our friend started the restoration going by cleaning the truck up and putting some new parts in it," McShane explained. The friend then sold the truck to the two collector car dealers. They used it for six to eight months before deciding to offer it at the New Jersey auction. "Our business has been growing and we just don't have the room for something this big on our lot," Steve admitted. "We need the room the truck takes up for cars."

McShane said the vehicle is a factory-built unit that was originally sold as a tow truck by the delivering dealer. For a period in the 1970s, Chevrolet assembled such trucks at its truck factories using tow bodies and wrecker units supplied by authorized vendors who were listed in the Chevrolet Silver Book.

A Chevy dealer could order job-specific equipment from the Silver Book and the factory would take care of the extra work involved in building a tow truck. Lankford Buick-Pontiac-GMC may have sold Chevys at one time and ordered the truck — or Lankford may have used a Chevrolet dealer to source it from.

### Everything Works

The truck has a fully-functional Holmes wrecker apparatus that also

dates from 1970. "Everything works," says McShane. "We have towed a lot of cars with it." The vehicles that McShane has towed include a second car he brought to sell at the Atlantic City auction, a 1970 Pontiac GTO. "We really got some stares going up the highway with a 1970 muscle car hooked to a 1970 tow truck," he pointed out. "We pulled the car all the way from Langhorne to Atlantic City."

Under the hood of the truck is a 350-cid V-8 that is hooked to a floor-shifted four-speed manual gearbox. "That thing just runs," McShane noted. "It never breaks or breaks down or overheats. In some cases, the truck runs better

than other cars we have on the lot."

Apparently the truck was well taken care of during its working years at Lankford Buick, because it required very little cosmetic or mechanical work to put it into collector condition. McShane and Horstmann had it resprayed with bright orange paint and added aftermarket chrome wheels to enhance its already good looks. Some chrome engine dress-up parts and new tires were all that were needed to complete the refurbishing of the truck.

### Attention-Getter

The classic Chevy has not really been restored in the true sense of the word, in which case it would have the Buick dealer's name lettered on the door, other tow truck graphics, original-style tires and wheels, and other throwback features. However, it draws attention the way it is. "The real tow truck operators — especially the older guys — go fanatical when they see it," says McShane. "And lots of younger people like the truck, too."

At the Atlantic City Classic Car Auction, McShane's biggest concern seemed to be whether the truck would be too big or too heavy to go up the wooden ramp that leads to the auction block. He told people who asked that he hoped to get a fair price for the truck, but was not looking to make a killing.

In the end, the truck failed to sell on the block, but we don't know what happened later. At most collector car auctions, many deals are put together after the bidding stops. Someone will eventually get a real gem. ☛

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