

HONORING THIS YEAR'S

Women Leaders in Transportation



This year, *FleetOwner* recognizes 12 women who not only hold the industry in the highest regard, but who promote safety and actively work to recruit more talent into trucking's ranks.

Since 2016, *FleetOwner* has worked to recognize and honor the women who are helping to shape the trucking industry by profiling some of the many outstanding women in trucking. The 12 women chosen for 2020 offer excellent examples of just how varied career opportunities for women can be in an industry that has been historically male dominated.

Selecting this year's list was difficult, as there are so many incredible women in the transportation industry to highlight. For this year's list, *FleetOwner* editors, with help from Ellen Voie, president and CEO of the Women in Trucking Association (WIT), selected women from a diverse pool of trucking's ranks.

We spoke with drivers, engineers, a technician, finance experts, and executives from state trucking associations who not only hold the industry in the highest regard but are promoting safety and actively working to recruit more talented people into trucking.

Since Voie started WIT 15 years ago, she noticed that the industry has been moving in the right direction when it comes to seeing women in more prominent roles. However, there is more work to be done.

"We started a Women In Trucking index, and we started tracking how

many female drivers, technicians, and women are in leadership, and it's still only about 25% of women in leadership," Voie said. "Of the publicly traded companies, half have no women in leadership. We think that's just wrong."

Voie did point out, however, that more women are taking over trucking businesses from their fathers. Roughly 15 to 20 years ago, that wouldn't have been a consideration, she said. "Every large carrier out there started with a man and a truck. Our goal is to see more women starting their own trucking companies and being more visible," she added.

As more women are recognized across the industry, Voie said trucking companies are realizing that women bring different perspectives to the boardroom, the office, and the road.

"I am seeing more companies that

are celebrating their women drivers and their women leaders," she explained. "I am seeing more women as drivers of the month. I am seeing more women competing at the state truck driving championships. We had our first-ever female solo driver of the year."

Over the last 15 years, Voie has been pushing to convince the industry that women are safer drivers. In fact, the American Transportation Research Institute found that men were 20% more likely to be involved in a crash in every statistically significant area, noted Voie.

"If we don't tell their stories, then other women don't know that they can do this job and that they are welcome in this industry," she said. "Telling their stories is a great way to let other people know that there are great jobs in transportation."



In Memoriam

One of the saddest stories coming out of the industry this year was the unexpected death of Laura McMillan, vice president of training development for Instructional Technologies Inc., in May. She was 56 years old.

FleetOwner profiled McMillan back in 2018 as one of the top women in transportation. McMillan held a bachelor's degree in business management and a master's degree in instructional system design and adult learning. She also had an active CDL and more than 20 years of experience in transportation, and she earned her Certified Transportation Professional accreditation from the National Private Truck Council. Her many speaking engagements at industry conferences, published articles, and ability to solve problems made her one of the most recognized training people in the industry.



ALLISON ATHEY

Product Marketing Manager
VOLVO TRUCKS

During her sophomore year studying chemical engineering and chemistry at Virginia Tech, Allison Athey took on an internship with Volvo Powertrain in Hagerstown, Md. When she saw Volvo building the Class 8 truck engines, she was hooked.

“I thought it was the coolest thing,” Athey said. “I called them the ‘big engines,’ and I just had to work there.”

Athey was offered an internship with Volvo in 2008 and worked there until she graduated college. When she went out to look for a full-time job, she knew Volvo was where she wanted to be.

Athey, who also earned a master’s degree in business administration from Hood College, landed her first official job at Volvo as a powertrain engineer. For roughly five years while Athey worked on getting her master’s in business at night, she ran Volvo’s chemistry lab, where engineers test various ways to break powertrain components. When she finished her master’s program, she began looking for new opportunities within Volvo.

Volvo Trucks’ marketing department had an opening, and even though Athey didn’t know much about marketing,

she went for it. She got the job, became the product marketing manager in 2015 for transmissions, and relocated to North Carolina.

After transmissions, Athey did a short stint in Sweden for six months in 2018 at Volvo Trucks International to continue to expand her knowledge of the organization. When she returned home from Europe, she became the product marketing manager for Volvo’s VNL long-haul truck, which is the most popular model Volvo sells.

Athey is also a member of the Women in Trucking Association, and since Volvo is an allied member of the American Trucking Association’s America’s Road Team, she supports that as well.

Athey has officially worked at Volvo for the last 10 years—12 years total counting her internship at Volvo Powertrain. She also has her Class A commercial driver’s license, which she said has made a huge difference in her current role.

“I joke and say I drove more miles

“I joke [that] I drove more miles in a truck last year than in a car. I do it to understand what the trucks do and what the drivers are experiencing.”

in a truck last year than in a car,” she quipped. “I do it to understand what the trucks do and what the drivers are experiencing. I can’t emphasize it enough for someone in a position like me. To really understand something hands on makes all the difference in the world.”

Over the course of her career, one of the most notable challenges Athey had to overcome was making the move to marketing from engineering.

“If you look at what an engineer typically is and the work they are doing, it’s more closed off,” she said. “I think I talk too much to be an engineer to begin

with. I think marketing suits my personality a little better.”

“It was a big change of mindset,” Athey added. “I went from just looking at the powertrains to looking at the truck holistically and getting a bigger view of what our customers are doing. That was a massive change for me, but a really good one, because I love it.”

During that transitional phase, Athey relied on her network and learning all she could from Volvo’s marketing team. It also took a lot of long hours, many weekends, and learning day-in and day-out what was needed to get the job done.

Athey explained that some of her most notable highlights at Volvo include launching the new VNL and VNR models back in 2017. She added that is she proud of the various features that she helped launch and bring to market.

“The coolest one for me was back in 2017, when I was the transmission manager at the time. We brought in the all-new I-Shift transmission to market. It shifted so much more smoothly than ever before,” Athey added.

Then, in 2019, Volvo launched its next-generation Active Driver Assist. Athey was also involved in bringing that project, which improved the company’s forward-collision mitigation technology, to market.

“Anytime one of those features is on a truck, that to me, is the coolest thing,” she explained. “I can look at it and say, ‘Wow, I was personally involved in this, and that is always a good feeling—not only for me, but knowing that our customers are getting a better product and the product that they need.’”

—Cristina Commendatore



ALEXIS BURNS

Controller
VERIHA TRUCKING

Many who end up in trucking get their start by accident, and Alexis Burns, controller at Veriha Trucking Inc., is no different.

Burns just celebrated her five-year anniversary at Veriha Trucking, which provides transportation solutions in 48 states and parts of Canada. The company has a fleet of 250-plus drivers and hauls everything from paper products to groceries, produce, pet food, auto parts, and more. Veriha Trucking is owned by Karen Smerchek, who was featured in *FleetOwner’s* 2017 Women In Transportation feature.

As controller, Burns oversees not only Veriha’s accounting department and financials, but she also oversees the carrier’s information technology department. For what she calls a “hybrid role,” Burns taps into her accounting and business intelligence background. She has a bachelor’s degree in accounting and a master’s in business administration with a focus on business informatics, which provides insight on how to utilize business intelligence data and reporting to drive informed business decisions.

Veriha Trucking is Burns’ first intro-

duction to the industry.

“I enjoy the trucking industry so much because there is so much to learn, there is so much data, and there are so many different areas that you can use that data and truly drive decisions—whether it be mpg-related, total miles, deadhead in the operations area, expenses, and all those different things,” she said.

When Burns first started at Veriha, she said that the company didn’t have much in terms of business intelligence reporting. But soon after she started, the carrier implemented IBM’s Cognos Analytics, which has been one of Burns’ main focuses.

As a self-proclaimed “data nerd,” Burns said she most enjoys leveraging data to help save money and truck drivers’ time.

“I have been driving those business intelligence reports and getting them in front of the decision makers and the people who make adjustments

“There is so much to learn, there is so much data, and there are so many different areas that you can use that data and truly drive decisions.”

to improve certain areas,” she said. “I think it’s just exciting to see them make those adjustments and to see the savings and benefits from it. I would have never put myself in this industry, but I definitely have enjoyed it.”

When Burns started her career in trucking five years ago, she explained that she felt almost inadequate in many ways because she was so new to the industry and had so much to learn. So, she tried to take past experiences from previous roles and translate them into trucking, but she found out that it doesn’t quite work that way for this

particular industry.

“I think that has been one of my bigger challenges—realizing that what worked in other industries is completely different in trucking,” she noted. “I have had to change my mindset to the way trucking works and adapt.”

Now that Burns has figured out her role in trucking, she is part of the newly developed Paycheck Protection Program data analytics group. The first in-person meeting was initially scheduled for April, but because of COVID-19, the group had to kick things off virtually.

Earlier this year, Burns was also nominated for and named to the Women In Trucking (WIT) Association’s Top Women to Watch in Transportation. The editorial staff of WIT’s *Redefining the Road* magazine selected individuals for their significant career accomplishments in the past 12 to 18 months as well as their efforts to promote gender diversity in trucking. This year, WIT’s publication identified 51 women who have been nominated as top performers.

Those listed on the 2020 Top Women

to Watch in Transportation work for motor carriers, third-party logistics companies, equipment manufacturers, retailer truck dealers, professional services companies, technology innovators, and private fleets.

As someone who still feels relatively new to trucking, Burns said she would tell others looking to jumpstart their career in the industry to keep an open mind.

“I am constantly learning something, and I love it. Just be ready to learn, embrace it, and dive in.”

—Cristina Commendatore



REBECCA CHEWNING

Parts Counter Representative
RUSH ENTERPRISES

When Rebecca Chewning's first employer was falling on hard times, she began to think about her next steps and started to job hunt. When she came upon a job titled "admin assistant," she had no doubts that she could tackle it. Little did she know that the job title was slightly misleading. Chewning found herself as a service administrator working directly with the service department of a printing company in Texas. There began her first steps into the trucking industry.

After several years working at the front of the service department, Chewning transitioned to become a parts counter representative at Rush Enterprises. Her favorite part of the job?

"The face-to-face time with the truck drivers and our customers," Chewning noted. "Getting to know them, getting to know the ins and outs of the trucks. I've always worked with a great group of guys that never tried to hold me back or keep me out of the loop with things. They would show me how the trucks work, how the parts work, what things are called. The parts guys are always willing to help out, not

only myself, but any of our partners that need assistance and understanding."

Having a great support system is just one of many things Chewning attributes to her longevity in trucking.

"As a female, you kind of have to prove yourself. You have to show people that 'No, I do know what I'm talking about, and I do know what I'm doing,'" she said. "And get your reputation out there. There have been 30 some-odd people over the course of my time in trucking who have been a support system for me to help me prove that."

While Chewning has built a reputation of credibility throughout her time in the industry, she hasn't stopped searching for more.

"I'm still constantly asking questions, trying to know more," she said. "Don't be afraid to ask for help. Don't be afraid to reach out to your coworkers, or even outside of your team because they're going to have advisers; they're going

"I'm still constantly asking questions, trying to know more. Don't be afraid to ask for help. Don't be afraid to reach out to your coworkers."

to have things that they can share with you that will also be helpful. You can't stay in your little bubble or be afraid. You have to hold your head up high. Ask the question, and don't be afraid to say, 'I don't know.'

One morning recently, Chewning said she had to say, "I don't know" to a customer, but she was able to immediately follow up. "Never leave them at 'I don't know' and move on. Ask for that help, regardless."

Chewning needed no help, however, when she made history last year as the first female All-Around Grand Champion

at the Rush Truck Centers 14th annual Tech Skills Rodeo and brought home the gold for the Hino Parts Division.

"I hope it opens more doors and opportunities for more females to be inspired to do this," Chewning said. "I encourage any of our new hires that I work with to take the test, even if you've only been here a month. Take the test, because then you kind of know what to look forward to. And if you make it, that's even better. Just go down there, experience it, and have a great time."

As technology continues to evolve, the importance of staying on top of innovations in the industry is even greater.

"Our systems are changing, you're changing, the parts are changing," she said. "I've worked with a gentleman who's been doing this for 26 years, and he still asks questions because things are constantly changing and evolving. You're not going to know the answer day-to-day all of the time—nobody is—so you can't be afraid to ask for that help. Put yourself out there and make yourself vulnerable by asking your coworkers,

whoever it is you need, for that help."

Chewning's plans for the future are surrounded by her desire to learn.

"I just want to keep learning and eventually become a parts manager in my department. From there, I know that we have many, many opportunities at Rush, but I just want to be able to learn as much as I can about the company, about our customers, and the trucks before I try and make a next step. I want to make sure I'm ready, prepared and confident in myself before I make any sort of transition to the next level."

— Catharine Conway



SUSIE DE RIDDER

Truck Driver

ARMOUR TRANSPORTATION
SYSTEMS

Susie De Ridder got her start in the industry early on in life. Her father owned a trucking company and began bringing her for rides when she was a toddler. Even at a young age, she noticed there were no women behind the wheel, so she asked her father why.

"He looked at me and said, 'There's no reason why ladies can't be behind the wheel as well as men,'" De Ridder explained. "That always kind of stuck with me through my years growing up."

De Ridder has been a professional truck driver for the last 40 years and has about 4 million accident-free miles. She is a company driver at Armour Transportation Systems in New Brunswick, Canada, and she just won the Women In Trucking (WIT) Association's inaugural Female Driver of the Year award. The award recognizes female professional drivers who lead the industry in safety standards and actively work to enhance the public image of the trucking industry.

Before receiving the award, De Ridder knew she was one of three finalists. The finalists were supposed to

travel to Louisville, Ky., to the Mid-America Trucking Show, which was canceled because of COVID-19.

One night, De Ridder got a surprise call from Ellen Voie, president and CEO of WIT, telling her she had won.

"I told Ellen that it was like winning the Golden Globe of Trucking," De Ridder said. "I couldn't believe it."

De Ridder officially began her career in trucking as a dispatcher and did rate quoting and back-office work. But when she got her commercial driver's license and set out on the open road, she never looked back. She did, however, run into some challenges along the way. When De Ridder first started driving, there were no designated showers for women at truck stops.

"The showers were for males only at the time. Women would have to get someone to watch out and secure the door to shower safely," she explained.

Additionally, De Ridder, and other

"I feel that any public exposure I can give that shines a positive light on the industry might inspire someone else to join."

women truckers at the time, were faced with rude comments and scrutiny over how well they could do the job from their male counterparts. Plus, safety at truck stops—especially at night—has always been more of a challenge for women, De Ridder explained.

Now, however, male truck drivers are used to seeing more women behind the wheel, and the attitude toward female drivers has shifted, De Ridder pointed out. It also doesn't hurt that women have proven they could do the job just as well.

Throughout her career, De Ridder

has displayed her show trucks at the Mid-America Trucking Show, at the Great American Truck Show in Dallas, and at the Walcott Truckers Jamboree in Iowa. At those shows, she won awards for her refurbished 1957 and 1987 Peterbilts.

Since 2015, De Ridder participated in the WIT "I Heart Trucking" photo contests, securing three first-place finishes and two runner's up awards.

In 2018, she was named to the WIT Image Team and has appeared in various magazines as a representative of the industry.

"I feel like when a woman picks up that magazine, she might be persuaded by seeing what I am doing and what I have accomplished," De Ridder said. "I feel that any public exposure I can give that shines a positive light on the industry might inspire someone else to join."

While continuing to haul across the U.S. and Canada on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic, De Ridder said she is doing all she can to stay healthy and safe, noting that she has

never wiped her steering wheel so much in her life.

At the end of the day, De Ridder is proud to represent the industry and happy to have a job she loves. She also expressed her gratitude for the people she has met who have shown their support for truckers on the front lines.

"I feel thankful that I have this job and that I can still get out and see the beautiful sunsets and sunrises," she said. "I am just thankful for the little things in life."

— Cristina Commendatore



JESS GRAHAM

Truck Driver

GTO TRUCKING

Halloween 2012. Truck driver Jess Graham planned to take a night off from homeschooling her daughter on the road so they could trick-or-treat. But her dispatcher had a better idea. Knowing her daughter was with her, the dispatcher sent Graham to deliver a load to the Hershey Company plant. There, Graham's daughter would have the trick-or-treat of her life—an entire pillowcase full of Hershey chocolates and candies direct from the source.

Graham, who operates "The Black Widow," a 1995 Freightliner FLD, is one of two drivers for Georgia-based GTO Trucking. She has been in transportation for most of her adult life but has been driving heavy trucks since 2012 when she got custody of her daughter.

"My skills were driving, and all [the jobs] available required a Class A license. I jumped in and went for it," Graham said.

"I left the taxi-sedan service and went to a mega carrier. I was determined to make it, and within 11 weeks, I was on my own with 'The Black Widow' and was able to pick up my daughter to start our new life.

"When I got my daughter, my dis-

patcher would run me out to Sterling, Ill., to the local Walmart, for a couple of days every three or four weeks because there was another parent driver there who had his son in the truck that was a year younger than my daughter, and he was homeschooling his son in the truck as well," she explained.

The two children would be able to sit in the drivers' lounge, play games and interact, and run around. Everyone at that Walmart knew both kids, explained Graham, and the dispatcher always had treats in her drawer for them.

When reminiscing about her start in the industry, Graham stated that "no one enters trucking because they are just doing amazing and it's a bucket list item. People who enter are usually at the end, and it's sink or swim. It's an industry that with hard work and determination, someone can really change their station in life."

"In my journey to find other women

"Trucking has given me the freedom to set my own path and be my own boss, so don't give up on yourself before you actually get into the industry."

like myself, I found the Real Women In Trucking. They are a driver-led advocacy organization headed by Desiree Wood. Not only am I a member, but I am also an alternate board member. Our mission is to speak for the those who need a voice."

This past year, Graham became part of the group that started T.E.A.R. (Truckers Emergency Assistance Responders), a charitable organization that helps stranded drivers when issues such as carrier abandonment, wage theft, retaliation, truck accidents, sexual misconduct between trainers/

co-driver teams, and other various scenarios arise. Too often, these drivers must suddenly find a way to get home, if they have a home at all, explained Graham.

"Every day is a challenge," she said. "As I was just getting my footing, I was also a single mother homeschooling my daughter in the truck.

"Also, being a huge minority in the industry, bullying is common even among groups that are supposed to support women. The biggest challenge I overcame was gaining the confidence to know that I excel in this industry, and no one can bring me down."

Graham's advice?

"Go big. Don't accept less than your best. Don't settle for restrictions, especially automatic. Drive stick shift. You could have asked me to land on the moon before I would have figured out how to shift, but don't let up," she said.

"Get every endorsement you can, and then the sky is the limit. Bide your time. Get your CDL. Be a com-

pany driver or drive on your own.

"I wish I would have gotten hazmat, tanker, doubles and triples [Class A CDL endorsements] in the beginning," Graham continued. "If the company or the school you're at offers those, get them all for the long run. It will open many more possibilities and opportunities.

"Trucking has given me the freedom to set my own path and be my own boss, so don't give up on yourself before you actually get into the industry."

— Catharine Conway



HILLARY HANSEN-HAGEN

Marketing and Data Mining Manager

JAM BEST-ONE FLEET SERVICES

Since starting her job for a fleet service provider back in 2014, Hillary Hansen-Hagen has become an advocate for the trucking industry. She will be the first to admit she had succumbed to believing the same stereotypes many outside of the industry have about truckers and the trucking industry.

"I've definitely become an advocate because I see it now and it bugs me," Hansen-Hagen said, of people believing stereotypes that truck drivers are slovenly and the industry is made up mostly of men. "I had to get my head around it and realize that the stereotypes were just that, and kind of learn on my own that there are women in the industry. Truckers are great people, and they've got a bad rap."

So great, in fact, that Hansen-Hagen is married to one. She connected with Mack Trucks enthusiast and professional truck driver Jamie Hagen in 2016. They tied the knot in June 2019.

Hansen-Hagen is the marketing and data mining manager for JAM Best-One Fleet Service, an independent in-shop

and roadside mechanical and tire service provider based in Toledo, Ohio. The JAM Best-One enterprise has eight locations throughout Michigan and Ohio and is part of the larger Best-One network, which has grown to more than 250 locations in 11 states since its founding in 1948.

Hansen-Hagen manages the company's website, listed breakdown services, and customer marketing such as email campaigns and direct contact marketing for follow-up services. As part of her marketing role, she relies heavily on data to build on customer relationships and create more customized campaigns for individual customers.

"My boss is a data junkie," Hansen-Hagen said. "In my marketing perspective, I know that if you want to do anything, you have to prove that it works."

She provided this example for how she utilizes data to serve customers: "We pull client reports to see what a certain client purchases the most of,

"I totally geek out about antique trucks. I do love me some chrome," Hansen-Hagen said, laughing. "I know not everybody is a fan, but you know, some super tricked-out trucks, cool paint jobs. I love all of that."

But, more than anything, Hansen-Hagen said she enjoys the people she works with in the industry most.

"I have not met a nasty person in the trucking industry. Period. At all—in any segment [of the industry]," Hansen-Hagen said.

Hansen-Hagen offered this advice for those either starting out in the industry or interested in making the jump to trucking: "Forget everything you've heard."

"Have fun. Enjoy the people. Enjoy your job," she added. "It's really hard to be bad at something you really enjoy doing. If you can find the fun in your in your day-to-day, regardless of what industry you're in, it makes all the difference."

Trucking has made a lasting impact on Hansen-Hagen's life—both personally and professionally—and she

"If you can find the fun in your day-to-day, regardless of what industry you're in, it makes all the difference."

to see if there's any sort of incentives going on that we can target to them," she explained. For example, if a customer purchases tires often from JAM Best-One, Hansen-Hagen may create incentive for the customer to set up an alignment program with the company as well.

Hansen-Hagen got her start in marketing, and the transportation industry, while working at a car dealership early in her career. There, she had realized her passion for vehicles, which was amplified when she took the position at JAM Best-One.

hopes others outside of the industry continue to recognize advancements that can make the industry more efficient and safe.

"You can't get rid of trucks because they're literally what move not only everything that we get, touch, use, taste, see, feel, call on, but they also move the economy at the same time," Hansen-Hagen said. "I'm hoping that the perception changes and technology makes it easier for truckers, safer for truckers, and more fuel efficient to help the environment."

— Erica Schueller



KENDRA HEMS

President

TRUCKING ASSOCIATION OF NEW YORK

Kendra L. Hems has been around the trucking industry since she was eight. Her family owned a trucking company, and she initially started working at the family business for extra money during college, though she never intended to make trucking a lifelong career.

“But as I got into it, I really began to love it,” explained Hems. “Once I graduated college, I started dispatching at my family’s company with the intent of going back to graduate school and never did.”

Hems worked for her family’s company for another two years after graduating college before landing a job at the Trucking Association of New York (TANY) in 1999. She has been the association’s president since 2008.

As president, Hems is primarily focused on government affairs and industry relations. She lobbies for the organization and advocates on behalf of New York’s trucking industry. TANY also works closely with regulatory agencies like the state Department of Transportation (DOT) and Federal Motor Carrier

Safety Administration.

Most of the association’s 560 members are smaller carriers. Often, when TANY holds larger events, many don’t have the time or resources to attend, Hems noted. “A big piece of what we’re doing is transitioning a lot of our events to a virtual platform,” she said. “The continual education and training options for our members is a big initiative that we will continue to focus on.”

The association also advocates for workforce development in New York’s trucking industry. The goal is to recruit new drivers, technicians, operations managers, dispatchers, etc., into the industry.

TANY started a program with a charter school in Western New York that introduces students in junior high school to transportation. Last year, what started out as a logistics club ended up becoming a state-accredited course at the school, noted Hems. The goal

“I love the job, and I love the industry. I think that comes through in the relationships we build and the work we do.”

is to introduce that model to other schools to promote trucking as a viable career choice.

Over the years, some of TANY’s biggest accomplishments have included its work in New York City, building relationships with the city’s DOT, the mayor’s office, and the City Council. Hems was recently named to Mayor Bill de Blasio’s Surface Transportation Council as part of the COVID-19 reopening plan.

“I am really proud of what we have been doing here,” Hems said. “New York City is a really tough environment,

and the trucking industry is not always held in the highest regard.

“So much of what I do I do because I love,” she added. “I love the job, and I love the industry. I think that comes through in the relationships we build and the work we do.”

Early on in her career one challenge Hems had to overcome was when she first started working as a dispatcher at her family’s company.

“I was a family member, I was a young female, and I don’t think the drivers at the time had a lot of confidence in my ability,” she explained. “I really had to prove myself to the drivers that I was there because I could do the job, not just because I was a family member. I did learn a lot of lessons in that.”

One of the most important lessons Hems learned is that caring about people goes a long way, particularly for drivers, who are often away from their families. Hems made it a point to consider their concerns and needs, and she worked with drivers to ensure they could return home for important family events.

“We often refer to this industry as a family, and it’s so true. I think partly because so many trucking companies started as family-owned businesses, so there is a real culture of family within the industry,” Hems said.

“Every day is a new day,” she added. “I’ve been at the association 21 years this year, and there is always a new challenge that comes up. Being able to address those challenges and do something to help your members or the industry gives you that extra motivation to keep going every day.”

— **Cristina Commendatore**



ANN MARY MYERS

Engineering Supervisor

PACCAR LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

Ann Mary Myers has had a passion for heavy-duty engineering since high school. She ended up taking that passion to further her education in engineering and control systems in college, making her dream a reality.

Five years ago, Kenworth Truck Company found Myers’ resume, which included some of her electronics projects from college. Those projects included a black box for automobiles and a vehicle obstacle avoidance system. “The rest, as they say, is history,” noted Myers.

While working as an engineering supervisor for Kenworth Truck, the company nominated Myers to join the highly competitive Paccar Leadership Development Program, a rotational program on five continents over 18 months with assignments including finance, operations, and marketing. She has been in that role since December 2019 and works with different divisions within Paccar in various functional areas and geographical locations to gain a broad understanding of the business.

Myers has a master’s degree in electrical engineering, with a specialization in

control systems, from New York University. She also earned her master’s degree in business administration from the University of Washington in 2019, and she obtained her Class A commercial driver’s license (CDL) in Washington State.

She is part of the Women in Trucking Association and is on the board of the nonprofit F-Factor, which supports at-risk youth in the Seattle area through fashion by providing resources needed to dress for success. Myers also served time with the Society of Women Engineers as the chair of the Scholarships and Awards committee in the Pacific Northwest.

Myers explained that she thoroughly enjoys being part of an industry that has constantly been on the cutting-edge of technology. “Transportation and automotive are among some of the few industries that have perfected efficiency and economies of scale,” she noted. “That makes me very proud.”

However, one challenge that Myers

“I completed my CDL training while working full time and raising a four-year-old. Saying that it was difficult would be an understatement, but at the same time, it was not impossible.”

had to face in her trucking career was driving a 1994 Class 8 truck that wasn’t suited well for people her size.

“At five feet, three inches, I am not the tallest person,” she said. “It was a difficult experience as the seats and mirrors could not be adjusted to suit my height, which compromised my road visibility and ability to reach the pedals.”

In comparison, Myers said the Kenworth W990 makes her feel as comfortable as she would driving her car.

During her time at Kenworth, Myers noted that all her roles have stood out in their own ways, starting with her first role as an engineer responsible for the MX engine software release in North America. In addition, the work that she and her team have accomplished over the past few years at Kenworth will launch soon with the OEM’s new product.

“I can’t provide more details about it, but what we achieved is unparalleled in the industry, and I can’t wait for you to see and try it out,” she said.

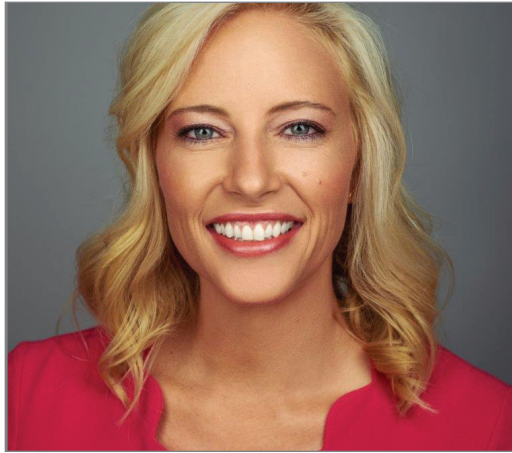
When Myers is looking to hire new talent, besides the typical skill sets for the particular job, she looks for a prospective candidate’s willingness to learn.

“Never stop learning,” she advised. “In my early days at Kenworth, I took The Strength Finder test as a part of a training program. This was back when I was more worried about my weaknesses and the skills I didn’t have rather than the skills I did. The biggest learning experience I had through this was focusing on your strengths really helps you become

even more open to learning new things, which, in turn, helps mitigate your perception about weaknesses.

“I always encourage people around me to believe in themselves,” Myers added. “I completed my CDL training while working full time and raising a four-year-old. Saying that it was difficult would be an understatement, but at the same time, it was not impossible. I want to conclude by saying, always keep going, onward and forward.”

— **Cristina Commendatore**



SHANNON NEWTON
President
ARKANSAS TRUCKING ASSOCIATION

Trucking is a major industry in Arkansas. “We’re actually No. 1 in the country and per capita for trucking employment,” said Shannon Newton, president of the Arkansas Trucking Association. Because trucking is a critical part of the state’s economy, Newton and her team play a prominent role in representing and supporting those in the industry.

“We’re here to advocate on behalf of the industry to make sure that ideas don’t turn into bad public policy, and to make sure that those who are in charge of making rules and regulations understand how they impact the business and the industry of trucking,” Newton explained.

Newton wears many hats in her day-to-day job, including management responsibilities with employees, budgets and oversight, support for policy-making, as well as public relations and member relations.

Newton works with a variety of people on any given day. That is what makes her job so meaningful and enjoyable. “No one enjoys what they do if they don’t enjoy who they do it with,” she said. The range of individuals and

groups Newton works with spans from her internal staff, to small fleets who rely on support from the state association, to relationships built with representatives of Fortune 500 companies such as J.B. Hunt, Walmart and FedEx Freight, all with headquarters in Arkansas.

She also works closely with peers that run other state trucking associations, as well as with the American Trucking Associations (ATA). One reason for the close relationship with ATA is because the majority of Arkansas Trucking Associations’ members are long-haul fleets that cross state lines and are more widely impacted by federal regulations.

Newton has been serving the trucking industry for nearly two decades. She graduated from the University of Central Arkansas with degrees in accounting and computer information systems, securing a job with Little Rock, Ark.-based Maverick Transportation right

“Regardless of where you are in the country, where you are socioeconomically, where you are in the supply chain, everybody utilizes the services provided by the trucking industry.”

out of college. In June 2003, after a year at Maverick, Newton took a job at the Arkansas Trucking Association to keep the books and manage the association’s small carrier insurance program.

“I’ve had a few different titles, between then and now,” Newton said. “But as odd as that is in this day and age, I don’t know anything other than trucking.”

When it comes to the industry, Newton has kept her pulse on perpetual trends and challenges that remain at

the forefront of trucking.

“In my position, I feel like we’re problem solvers; we serve to prevent problems from happening or resolve them once they do,” Newton said. “When you take the driver shortage, how do we materially impact that for our members? That’s often something that’s hard to check boxes and mark that off the list.

“If you’re a list maker like me, you never get to cross that one off,” she continued. “That’s a challenge for me—being able to feel like you’re making an impact or moving the needle, yet some of the challenges never truly go away.”

Through all of her interactions, Newton’s ultimate goal is to help advance the trucking industry—both by supporting those already involved, and by showcasing the necessity and value of trucking to those not in the industry.

“I love it; I love everything about it. I love the essentiality and the way that the industry is so tangible and the service that it provides,” Newton said. “Everyone, regardless of where you are in the country, where you are socioeco-

nomically, where you are in the supply chain, everybody utilizes the services provided by the trucking industry.”

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the industry’s expansive reach.

“The health crisis has changed the way that we all live. The last three months have shone a very bright spotlight on who truck drivers are, what the trucking industry does, and how critically important it is to both our economy and our way of life,” Newton said.

— Erica Schueller



JOY ROHLINGER
Truck Driver
LAST CALL LOGISTICS

Joy Rohlinger decided to make a drastic career change at 39 years old. She previously worked as a pharmacy technician before she had a conversation with her husband, Andrew, that prompted her to consider becoming a truck driver. Rohlinger’s spouse owns and operates the Mayville, Wis.-based fleet, Last Call Logistics, which runs regional routes hauling building materials throughout the state.

“I asked him how much the drivers make, and it was twice as much as I was making,” Rohlinger recalled. “I said, ‘I could do this.’ He said, ‘Yes you could.’ It became a joke, and then it became serious.”

Rohlinger went on to enroll in a 12-week professional truck driving course at a Waukesha County Technical College, earning her Class A commercial driver’s license in December 2018. Since then, she has worked full time driving trucks professionally.

Rohlinger really likes her time on the road and said she has come to enjoy “me” time. It has given her a mental break.

“Usually I have a podcast going or an audio book playing, and I’m just going

and I’m enjoying my scenery,” Rohlinger said, about driving. “I’m enjoying whatever is in my ear, and I’m just in my zone. It’s the most personal time I’ve ever had in my life, and I’m getting paid for it.”

However, she stressed, truck driving isn’t for everyone. In addition to the isolation from others—which she enjoys, but some may not—Rohlinger said she puts in 60 to 70 hours per week, often starting her day between 4 and 6 a.m.

For those serious about a career change, Rohlinger recommended attending a professional truck driver training course, “even if it’s not required in your state,” she said. She confirmed the skills and information from a professional course gave her more insight into the business and access to networking with potential employers.

One person she has convinced to follow in her footsteps is her daughter, Olivia, who is a class of 2020 graduate

ing high school senior.

Rohlinger’s daughter intended to enroll in the summer semester at the same truck driving school, but school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic have so far delayed those plans.

Also, as far as the impact of COVID-19 on Rohlinger’s everyday job, she said one of the big changes has been adjusting to the different procedures for picking up and delivering loads at each location.

“Every single vendor has a different policy when you get there,” Rohlinger said. “At one of the stops I go to fre-

quently, they don’t want to see drivers at all anymore. You don’t go into the office; you don’t go onto the docks. There’s a sign on the door at the shipping office that says, ‘Don’t come in. Call this number to check in.’

“Then after you check in, you put your paperwork in the back of your trailer, back into the dock, and they lock you in,” she continued. “When you’re done, you get the green light to go, and your paperwork is signed inside the trailer waiting for you. You never see a single person.”

When Rohlinger is driving, her mindset is to stay on the road as much as possible, and to take breaks only where it’s the most efficient use of her time, like during loading or unloading.

“I keep going and I take my break time while I’m sitting in a dock somewhere or, if I’m doing a drop and hook, I might sit and eat for 30 minutes,” Rohlinger explained. “I do not want to stop, because every time you pull off the road to stop for any reason, no matter how quick you are, you lose 20 minutes (per stop).”

“I’m just in my zone. It’s the most personal time I’ve ever had in my life, and I’m getting paid for it.”

While Last Call Logistics currently runs only in Wisconsin, Rohlinger said the company plans to expand routes out of state in the future. While she primarily drives for Last Call Logistics, she does assist with certain operations and sees herself transitioning to a more prominent role in the office eventually. For now, she’ll be staying behind the wheel.

“I think as I get older, I’ll want to drive less,” Rohlinger said. “But I do enjoy that time (on the road). Like I said, it has turned into my ‘me’ time.”

— Erica Schueller



AMANDA SCHUIER
Vice President
QUALITY TRANSPORT

In 1983, Amanda Schuier sat on her grandfather's lap atop a Mack Truck, one of the many at her grandfather's Mack dealership, not knowing that years later, she'd find herself working in the same industry.

"I went to college, double majored in journalism and Spanish, and was living in downtown Kansas City," she said. "After I was laid off from a meeting and event planning agency in 2006, I saw a marketing job at a truck dealership. At first, I didn't connect the dots that my grandfather had a really successful career in transportation."

Today, Schuier has picked up where her grandfather left off. For her, the trucking industry was love at first sight.

"Everything about it—the people felt like the kind of people that I wanted to be with, and I was excited about what I was doing on a daily basis," Schuier said.

Despite the trucking gene skipping a generation—Schuier's father is a dentist—her grandfather got to see her start in the industry before he passed away in 2007. "He knew I was working with trucks, and he just thought it was the coolest thing ever because he

was kind of an older conservative guy, so even though his son didn't go into transportation, his granddaughter did."

Since 2006, Schuier has learned that it takes certain character traits—like a strong-willed attitude and perseverance—to succeed in this industry.

"I'm an upfront kind of person," Schuier said. "I think one of the reasons that I've succeeded is because I've proven my credibility. In order to do that, I've had to educate myself even more, and make sure I'm aware of what's going on in the industry, so that the answers that I give are not dishonest. If I don't know the answer, it's more important to just say 'I don't know the answer' than to make something up."

As an active member of the American Trucking Associations' Technology & Maintenance Council (TMC), Schuier has continued on another legacy as the fourth female to be a

study group chairwoman since 1939, currently holding the position as the chairwoman of the TMC Connect S.5 Fleet Maintenance Management Study Group.

In addition to her time spent working with other members of the trucking industry, Schuier enjoys spending time going to career fairs at elementary, middle and high schools and talking about jobs in transportation.

"I think one of the things that I can say to all those kids is that I've had an amazing career in transportation, an industry that is often overlooked," she

explained. "For example, I did not go to college to work in trucking, and now I've been in it for almost 15 years. And so far, it's been very rewarding for me."

Speaking to children of those ages encourages them to be open to all of the opportunities the world has to offer. For the trucking industry, Schuier's biggest piece of advice is "be a sponge" and "learn everything you can about the industry."

She has even taken her own advice and continues to carry on the lessons she learned from her first trucking job at Murphy-Hoffman Company. "One of the things they had me do was go through what their salespeople go through in terms of learning all the basic terms, parts, and all the ins and outs of the truck," she said. "That way, you learn everything you can, so that you can talk the talk and walk the walk."

"Find mentors who will help you," Schuier emphasized. "Have people in your life who you can ask questions, even if you feel those questions are totally ridiculous."

"Build a network and attend indus-

try events," she continued. "Sign up for webinars, and just learn as much as you can. I can't tell you how many people have helped guide me in my career who I can be completely brutal and honest about what I'm going through in my job and ask them for tips and pointers. I've had several mentors who have really helped me push myself to be better, in terms of taking on new roles or taking on new responsibility. They've served as my coaches to help push me when I wasn't sure that I could take on more or be pushed."

— Catharine Conway

"Find mentors who will help you. Have people in your life who you can ask questions, even if you feel those questions are totally ridiculous."



GINA VECCHIONI
National Account
Sales Executive
PACCAR LEASING

Gina Vecchioni got her start in the trucking industry 32 years ago after graduating from Michigan State University. She started out as a rental customer service representative at Ryder in 1988, and over the course of 25 years at Ryder, she worked as a manager trainee, a one-way rental manager, a branch manager, and a rental account manager before rounding out her tenure there in lease sales.

For the last six years, Vecchioni has worked in national sales at Paccar Leasing (PacLease). Earlier this year, she was the first woman to receive Paccar Leasing's Top National Account Sales Executive award.

"It was a great honor," Vecchioni said, explaining that the recipient must have the most trucks signed, leased, and funded through PacLease for that calendar year. She noted that 2019 was a huge year for truck orders.

"I was lucky enough to have established a bit of an account base," Vecchioni added. "Over the last five years, I was able to develop relationships with some really great customers; this put me in a good position when we had this big uptick in 2019."

As a national account sales execu-

tive, Vecchioni is responsible for cultivating new and managing existing customers that have large truck fleets across multiple locations. The position also entails developing strong partnerships with Paccar dealers and franchises.

In addition to her work at PacLease, Vecchioni is on the National Private Truck Council's (NPTC) membership committee and was named NPTC's allied member of the year in 2018, mainly for her volunteer efforts in the industry. She also helps grade NPTC's Certified Transportation Professional exams every year. Furthermore, she is on the PacLease Diversity Council and just became a member of the Women In Trucking Association.

Through the course of her career, one of the biggest challenges Vecchioni had faced was making it through all the economic downturns and recessions. She survived three of them and is now working amid the latest pandemic-induced recession.

"With a diverse workforce, our industry will be better equipped to approach the rapidly changing world with perspective. And with that, there will be no challenge we cannot overcome."

"The economic recessions are tough because companies always have to downsize. Customers want to turn in trucks, and that's challenging," she explained. "I was able to survive because I was fortunate to work for companies that were fairly flexible and worked well with their customers during the tough times."

Vecchioni also found balancing her work and family life challenging, particularly when her children were younger.

"Transportation is a demanding

job that requires a lot of long hours, and so is having a family," Vecchioni said. "There were many years I felt like I should be doing better in both areas. You never feel like you're doing enough—at home or at work. If our industry wants to attract the best and brightest, we need to do more to improve work-life balance."

With the challenges, though, typically come even greater achievements and successes. For Vecchioni, one of her biggest motivators is feeling like she helped her clients grow their business.

"The best memories I have are the people I have helped," she said. "I love being at a customer event and seeing a customer get in one of our trucks and drive it for the first time. They're so excited to be able to give this beautiful, premium truck to their drivers."

Over the years, Vecchioni has found that the best part about working in transportation is the people. "People in transportation tend to circulate around the industry. The longer you're in it, the more friendships you have and that makes your job and your life more

meaningful," she noted.

Vecchioni also has some perspective on the future. "Although there are some different backgrounds and personalities in transportation, we need to work hard to increase the diversity of our workforce in general," she explained. "With a diverse workforce, our industry will be better equipped to approach the rapidly changing world with perspective. And with that, there will be no challenge we cannot overcome."

— Cristina Commendatore