

# TOWING & RECOVERY FOOTNOTES

Tips on  
COLLECTIONS  
Page 25

October 2007

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## Towman Down!

*One type of recovery no operator wants to face*



Jason Cooke on the mend



The job that led to Jason's injury

### In This Issue:

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More Like Mike

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**By Allan T. Duffin**

*Jason Cooke and Jarrid Mikel were two of thousands of towers across the nation, dedicated to keeping the roadways clear and safe, working hard at the jobs they loved. But in a split second, a runaway snatch block and an out-of-control vehicle would knock both Cooke and Mikel out of commission — almost permanently.*

### Struck By A Block Jason Cooke

October 1, 2006: A clear, sunny day in North Carolina. On U.S. Highway 117, a two-lane blacktop stretching for 115 miles between the cities of Wilmington and Wilson, a construction team was working on widening the highway. Suddenly their excavator plummeted into a sinkhole on the side of the road.

Thirty minutes later, Jason Cooke pulled his tow truck to a careful stop near the sinkhole. He surveyed the scene in front of him. The excavator — which weighed twice as much as Cooke's 50-ton wrecker — was drenched in mud, its tracks buried in a pool of muck.

Two more trucks from Phillip's Towing in Fayetteville — 60- and 75-ton rotators — stopped alongside Cooke's vehicle, joining a 30-ton wrecker from another company that was already on-scene. The towmen spent the next half hour planning the recovery of the excavator, ensuring that the job would be done safely.

After the towmen completed the rigging, they gave the excavator a hard pull, to no avail. "The machine wasn't moving," recalled Cooke, "so we changed the positions of the trucks and re-rigged everything."

Cooke attached four lines on the driver's side and one line on the pas-

senger side. Another line was fastened 18 to 20 inches behind him. As Cooke began to tighten up the rigging, his equipment suddenly failed him.

### Airborne Assault

"A brand-new 5/8th-inch alloy chain broke," he recalled, "and a 12-ton snatch block came flying off the machine and hit me in the left leg." Cooke was thrown 30 feet from his truck and landed hard in the middle of the highway.

The other members of the recovery team, including Roland Russ and Cooke's boss Phillip McCorquodale, rushed over to Cooke's crumpled body. His leg was bleeding all over the pavement; his femur (the thigh bone) was cracked and sticking out.

The towmen cut through Cooke's pants to get to the wound, then pulled



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**2007 PETERBILT 378**, 475 hp, Cummins, 18 spd, air ride, 36" sleeper, dual chrome exhaust, engine brake, 24.5 alum. whls, ac, dual air ride seats, external air cleaners, am-fm-cd-cb-stereo, Century model 5130, serial #5130-0470-E07, 25 ton boom, 2-25,000lb planetary winches, air winch free spool, alum tubular pylon, MX 7000 strobe light bar, alum. body w/24" tunnel, hyd spades, air & elec. hookups, tail gate controls, 3 stage underlift w/tilt, lower work lights, stk#644402



**2007 PETERBILT 378 ITS HERE**, 565 Cummins, 18 spd, Miller spec chassis, ac, dual chrome exhaust, 20k front axle, alum. wheels, dual polished alum fuel tanks, air lift pusher axle, engine brake, cb-am-fm-stereo, 228" cab to bogie, air ride, cruise, New Century 1075 rotator, 1075S-077-F07, 3 stage recovery boom 75 ton, TOTAL OF 5 WINCHES, 3 underlift, 2-60K winches, 2 spd, 2-20K winches, 1-50K drag winch, 48" alum. tool box, 72" led 16 head light bar, upgrade 8 functions power touch, d-ring options, Hella boom floods, stk#644482

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**1997 PETERBILT 379 60 Series Detroit**, 10 spd, 646k miles, air ride, 294" WB, ac, engine brake, dual/chrome exhaust/alum fuel tanks, 2001 Century 5130, 25 ton boom, 2-25,000lb winches, alum. body, air winch free spools, 115" reach underlift panel, lower work lights, Whelen strobe light bar, 5 PR axle forks, Aero light Pylon, stk#440123

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**1993 KENWORTH T800**, 400 Cummins, 15 spd, 516K miles, stk#586632



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# TOW LINES

## Letters to the editor from our readers

*T&R Footnotes invites and encourages readers to submit letters on any towing topic by email to the editor at bcandler@traderonline.com*

**To the Editor:**

The time has come to tell you how state associations have failed and how to correct this. First, they need to focus on legislation that isn't just to help a few of the towers in a state. Better to have a Move Over law or a rotating-light law or something that applies to everyone.

Politicians like two things: money, which towers don't have much of, and votes, which towers don't have many of. Towing associations go to the politicians' aides and they say "We have 100 members in the state and we want this law passed." The aides just laugh at them, get their paychecks, and go home.

What towers need to say instead when they talk to a politician's aide is that "We have 100 members with 500 trucks with 1000 drivers that are on the road 24/7 and each truck does 10 jobs a day so that means we talk to 5000 people a day, people to which we will be handing out 35,000 flyers a week about the fact that the politicians don't want to help us and the public we serve.

Now if we had the motivation, the money, and the willpower to do this, we would be using the power of all the towers in the state (association members or not) to show how passing this law would help out all towers and the public. We could get, say, 1000 towers statewide handing out thousands of flyers a week, including leaving some at all the repair shops we do work for to be handed out to their customers. When we pick up a vehicle in a parking lot, we could have our drivers place flyers on all the cars parked there.

Then you leave a copy of the flyer with the politician's aide, and tell him that next time we want your boss here in person and that we will start handing out flyers like this within 30 days.

Now this is just a brief idea of what could be done but when I hear the old saying from some associations that we need the numbers (members) to do anything like this, I think "You people just don't get it. If you attempted to serve every tower in the state, member or not, kind of like I have suggested, and show the state's towers how you can do something more than just talk about things or work for the few rather than the many, then those member numbers might follow when the towers realize that you are working for them all."

This is how I see it, but then again maybe I need glasses.

**The Towing Curmudgeon**

**To the Editor:**

This email is in response to an article I read in your Footnotes paper. In the August 2007 issue, page 10, the "Do It With Class" article was focusing on "look good, be good, earn respect" and "Impress fellow responders with professional expertise."

I see one big problem with this article. A picture is worth a thousand words! In the picture illustrating this article, the tow truck driver has the old, blown-out tire leaning on the side of the customer's car!

I do not even own or run a towing company. I just picked up this newspaper in a towing facility while I was waiting for service and this is the first thing I noticed. I would not want a tire leaning up on the side of my vehicle and would hope if I called a "professional"

claiming to "look good, be good, and earn respect" that would not be an issue.

Courtney E. Holladay

**To the Editor:**

My father has been in the towing business for approximately 34 years. He called me this morning to look at the picture on page 10 of the August 2007 issue and asked me what was wrong with this picture. I took one look and immediately said that the tow driver did not have the customer in a safe place and the old tire and rim was leaning on the customer's car.

This picture looks as though it was taken at an intersection to gain or exit I-10. Anyone who works the interstate knows how dangerous that in itself could be.

According to the article "Do It With Class," we are to impress our fellow responders with professional expertise. The article itself was informative and made great suggestions, but the picture seems to indicate otherwise. When displaying pictures for advertising the article, I would suggest that they show the safety of the customer and driver first and foremost.

We enjoy *Towing & Recovery Footnotes* and look forward to each issue.

Mandy Barwick  
Manning, SC

**Editor's note:** Both writers are correct. The photo was selected by us to generally illustrate a towman helping a customer but we did not notice the offending tire. We'll be more careful in the future. Thanks to both writers for calling it to our attention. ☞

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# BRAINSTORMIN WITH STORMIN NORMAN

## Messy Lesson

*A very good example  
of really bad customer service*

By Stormin Norman Horton

You know you're getting older when your kid's marriages start popping off like birthdays every year. Mike, my youngest son, was married this summer. We went down to his fiancé's hometown a few days early so we could help get everything ready. After he arrived, he decided he wanted to get his car prepped for his honeymoon and he took it to Wal-Mart for an oil change.

Interestingly enough, the right hand didn't know what the left hand was doing in the service department. Mike called asking my advice about what kind of oil to put in the car. Well, I asked, what kind do they offer? The reply: Anything you want. So I asked, What brands do they have?

He told me the brands and weights and I made a recommendation based on that information. Later when we went back to pick up the car, nothing had been done. They hadn't done it because they couldn't use that type of oil in a hybrid car. A Honda hybrid requires 0/20 oil. Why wasn't he told that in the first place, I asked? Oh well, I said, use that hybrid oil and let's get the job done. So they put the car on the front of the line, changed the oil, and we left.

Later that evening he went to pick up one of his groomsmen at an airport about 50 miles away. On the way home the drain plug came out, the car lost all its oil, and I got a phone call in the early hours of the morning. What do I do? said Mike. First, check the oil, I said. Okay, there's none in it. My response: Sit tight because the only thing to do now is go on the hook. I called a tower I knew, and at two a.m., my son's car was loaded up and he was on his way back to the house.

### Watch & Learn

The next day I went with Mike to the Wal-Mart Service Department and told him to watch and learn. I asked to speak to the service manager in private. We sat in his office and had a chat and I explained the situation. The first thing he asked was if anyone else was involved and then he wanted to see the paperwork. He called in the shop foreman, who remembered us and right away questioned the type of oil that went in the car.

I said that is irrelevant because the type of oil has no bearing on a drain

plug coming out. It wasn't about the type of oil, I said, it was about no oil, period. And this wasn't your everyday situation — a honeymoon is dependent on that car!

After a period of explanation and discussion back and forth, they decided to turn it over to their in-house insurance company. Whenever this is done, the service managers wash their hands of the problem and there's nothing more locally that one can do.

So it's Friday afternoon, the wedding is tomorrow, and my wife will choke my son if he doesn't marry this girl. Naturally we want his engine repaired or replaced and a rental car. These are very reasonable expectations. Well, they said, we can't give you a rental car; you'll have to talk to the adjusters and they won't give you a claim number till Monday.

*"The only thing  
to do now  
is go on  
the hook"*

We were given an 800 number and I spent from lunch time on Friday till five p.m. trying to get hold of a real person. Every single menu on the voice mail went to an answering machine, cut me off, or otherwise ran me into a brick wall.

I started calling the store manager, then district managers, and finally got a call back from the assistant manager who was supposed to arrange for a tow truck to move it from Mike's home to a Honda dealer since Mike was leaving for his honeymoon and the rest of us were leaving town. The reason she called back? She wanted to give the car key back to us. She didn't, couldn't, or wouldn't understand that a towing company would actually pick up a key somewhere else on the way to a tow.

Amazing! They had never heard of a key pickup. In 20-some years of towing, more than once I think we picked up keys at another location, as I'm sure you have as well. It's just part of customer service. But I refused to go get the key because we were returning home after the wedding.

### How About A Rental?

Finally at 4:59 p.m., I got hold of someone with Wal-Mart's insurance agency. The representative was firm that if they determined that this was their fault, they would authorize a rental car.

Okay, I asked, so will you rent a car for me? Oh, no, they said, we can't rent a car for you. You'll have to rent it and we'll reimburse you if we determine it's our fault. (By the way, I had already taken care of the tow bill so now I'm out both that and a car rental.)

Fast forward a week and a half. The car had not been towed and was still sitting in my son's yard. The lady I was dealing with at the adjusting arm of Wal-Mart contacted the service department who claimed they didn't have time to have it towed because they were doing inventory.

Let's see, how difficult is it to get a car towed? You pick up the phone, you dial a number, and say, "Please tow such and such car at such and such address." Richard, the service manager, had promised me it would happen the next day. So much for promises.

So the car is finally taken to a Honda dealer. Enter Wal-Mart insurance again. Okay, they said, the vehicle has to be torn down before we can determine if it's our fault.

Wait a minute, I said, you've already taken pictures, you've already determined the drain plug is out. How will disassembly help determine fault? You're mixing up two separate situations, I added —you're mixing determination of fault with determination of damage. Determination of fault is easy because of the missing drain plug, plus the fact that it happened hours after your people did the oil change.

### No End In Sight

Anyway, Honda did some diagnostic work, put some oil in it, cranked it up, and said it doesn't seem to be knocking. "Doesn't seem to be" are the key words here. What they mean is they don't know; they don't have x-ray vision. I know I don't. Even getting certified as an ASE Master Auto and Master Truck technician didn't give me the ability to determine damage inside an intact engine.

So what happens? The lady with insurance company calls and tells me there's a bill at Honda that I need to pay for. Wait a minute, I said, why do we have to pay for your mistake?

As I write this article, the saga is ongoing. It remains to be seen how it will turn out. So what does all this have to do with the towing industry? Well, read it and learn how not to take care of a customer.

I don't care how good a tower you are, sooner or later you will run into a situation where there is vehicle damage. You should be able to sense from the saga of my frustration how I feel about being told I had to pay for someone else's screw-ups.

Just keep this in mind: If you handle it properly, your customer will tell two people. If you do not handle it properly, they'll tell 10 people. Clean up your mess and move on to another day. ☘

## How To Handle Damage Claims

I'm going to list some simple points relating to things that Wal-Mart did right and some they did wrong, things that should help you keep your customers from experiencing the severe frustration I am dealing with:

- Ask for all the paperwork. Was this pre-existing damage? Was there damage caused by the customer that was signed off on? You do have a damage notification on the back of the invoice, don't you? This is where a driver can note pre-existing damage and have a customer signed off.

- Bring in all interested parties and interview them one by one to see what has happened.

- Weigh this information with the honesty and truthfulness of your customer and your drivers. You know good and well you've had drivers you can't trust any further than you can throw them.

- During this time, agree with your customer. Say yes, this is a problem, this is something that needs to be resolved, and yes, we want to do the right thing, and yes, we must make a determination after we have all the facts.

- Do not get emotional during this time. The Wal-Mart people were surprised that I did not get emotional and scream and rant and rave like many customers with problems. This does not accomplish anything. All it does is put everyone on the defensive and put them in control. I was not interested in losing control so I kept my emotions in check. And I did present to them a win-win solution.

- Once the determination is made as to who is at fault, if it is 40 to 60 percent your fault, you should probably cough it up and take care of it. The damage costs X dollars, but your reputation is priceless.

- The damage assessment will determine who is going to pay for it. What will it cost? If it falls within your insurance deductible, you may want to take care of it out of pocket. If not, that's what insurance is for.

- A very simple concept that should not be overlooked: Ask the customer what it would take to make him or her happy. You might be surprised at how little someone may ask for to take care of the situation. Once you know who caused it, where the blames lies, what caused the problem, how much it will take to fix it, and what the customer is looking for, then you can take the proper steps to clean up the problem and make it go away. As they say in the south, before that wound festers, you can take that five-gallon bucket of lemons and turn into it into lemonade.

---Stormin Norman

## TOWMAN DOWN

continued from page 1

off his belt and sliced it into a makeshift tourniquet. After wrapping the belt around Cooke's damaged leg, Russ continued to provide first aid until the paramedics finally arrived.

The EMTs did their best to stabilize Cooke, then rushed him by ambulance to Duplin General Hospital in nearby Kenansville. "While this was going on," said Cooke, "Phillip made a phone call and got a helicopter in the air." McCorquodale had grown up in the area and knew that Duplin General would be unable to handle this type of trauma case, so he arranged for a medevac chopper to transport Cooke somewhere else. As the ambulance carrying Cooke pulled into Duplin General, the helicopter was landing nearby.

Cooke was immediately airlifted to Pitt County Memorial Hospital in Greenville. McCorquodale and Stewart Sealy arrived as Cooke was rushed into the emergency room. "When I arrived at Pitt Memorial, I was still in shock," remembers Cooke.

With his parents and fellow towers mounting a round-the-clock vigil, Cooke underwent surgery at five a.m. on October 2nd. "The doctors put a rod and six screws through my femur," said Cooke. "I had to have eight and a half pints of blood because I had lost so much after the accident."

Fortunately the surgery went smoothly, and Cooke spent the next 16 days under observation in the trauma unit at Pitt Memorial. His doctor then released him and he was sent home in an ambulance.

### A Painful Process

For Cooke, the struggle was just beginning. He was unable to bend his leg more than 22 degrees. His mother did what she could to make him comfortable, but the emotional and psychological trauma of the accident and its aftermath weighed heavily on the 27-year-old towman. "I was very, very down and out," said Cooke. In the blink of an eye, everything had changed. "Here I was, doing what I wanted, coming and going as I pleased. We had the best equipment money can buy. This



Jason Cooke talks with Glen Mikel, whose son Jarrid was badly injured by a careless driver

was not supposed to happen to us."

Cooke spent 92 days on his back. When he wasn't in bed, he worked with a physical therapist, desperately trying to regain a full range of motion in his battered leg. "It was a painful experience," said Cooke. "I had all these thoughts of not being able to walk again, not being able to play with my little girl again."

But he refused to throw in the towel — not only for the sake of his three-year-old daughter but also for the job he loved. Cooke kept at it, exercising his leg, suffering through bouts of excruciating pain. He used a walker to get around the house. Thanksgiving and Christmas came and went with Cooke unable to enjoy either holiday. His birthday passed him by.

Then, finally, some progress. "Sometime around the end of January I was able to move around a little bit better on my walker," Cooke recalled, "and I started using crutches for the first time." McCorquodale dropped by and drove Cooke to the office. Cooke hadn't been there since the accident three months before. "It was kind of hard, but I was glad to be back," said Cooke.

### Tow Truck Therapy

Soon after, with the encouragement of his family and fellow towers, Cooke returned to work as the operations manager for the Wilmington office of Phillip's Towing. He continued his rehabilitation, working with a physical therapist three times a week.

But in April, Cooke suffered a setback. "There was a two-and-a-half inch area of my femur that was shattered and didn't grow back together," he said. "So on April 2nd I had to have a second surgery." Doctors replaced the original rod in Cooke's leg and swapped out the original six screws with a dozen new ones. Finally, by June, Cooke was able to return to work.

Then came the most important part of his recovery: Cooke got back in his truck. McCorquodale issued him a new 2007 Kenworth rollback with automatic transmission. Slowly but surely, Cooke was getting back where he belonged. "I still have limitations as far as my leg is concerned," he said, "but I do work calls as I'm physically able."

Although the physical scars are healing gradually, the psychological trauma from the accident is another hurdle that Cooke must overcome. "There are some things we do as far as tractor trailers are concerned where we have to pull out the chains. When we do that," he said, "I get butterflies in my stomach."

### Team Support

But, adds Cooke, the support of his supervisor and fellow towers makes a huge difference in his day-to-day recovery. "It's a family atmosphere. Philip has done some things I don't think anybody else in his position would have done." McCorquodale took care of Cooke's financial obligations until worker's compensation insurance started to pay the bills. "He and his family bent over backwards to make sure that I was okay," said Cooke.

McCorquodale also gave Cooke the necessary push when it was needed.

"There was a time when I was down and out and didn't even want to talk on the phone," recalled Cooke. "Phillip would call my mom to see if I needed anything. Sometimes he would call me and say, 'Jason, get your butt out of bed. We're going out today.'" Because of all the support he has received, Cooke considers himself fortunate to be part of McCorquodale's company.

Reflecting on the incident that almost cost him his leg, Cooke has one thought in mind: "We buy the best equipment, the best trucks, the best of everything for the wreckers in our business," he said. "It becomes second nature that if we have the best, then nothing's going to happen. But it does. Just because you have the best that money can buy, people still get hurt." Although these types of incidents happen every day, "you never expect it to happen to you," he added.

And what are Cooke's plans for the future? Once his leg allows it, "I want to go back to driving the heavy wrecker."

### Hit By A Truck Jarrid Mikel

Perhaps the only towers who can truly empathize with Cooke are others who have been through a similar prolonged and painful recovery. Twelve hundred miles northwest of Cooke's office is the city of Des Moines, Iowa — the home of G&S Service/I-80 Towing, Inc. There, three years ago, owner Glen Mikel saw one of his employees through a horrible accident — except in this case, the victim was Mikel's own son.

On a bitterly cold winter morning, Jarrid Mikel responded to a call from a state trooper. A Ford van had broken down and was resting next to the jersey barrier on the East 14th Street bridge, part of Interstate 80 in central Iowa. It was five a.m. and the asphalt was thick with ice and snow.



The block that struck Jason

## TOWMAN DOWN

continued from page 5

Mikel turned his collar to the cold and hooked the van up to the wheel lift on his wrecker. He tied down the left front tire and began working with the right front wheel.

Suddenly a pickup truck, barreling down the highway at a rapid clip, spun out of control on the bridge. The pickup flew into the disabled van, hitting Mikel with enough force to throw the 20-year-old tower underneath his own truck.

Though badly hurt, Mikel was able to pull out his cell phone and make a call. "He's on his Nextel hollering at one of my drivers for help," recalled Glen Mikel, Jarrid's father. "I was out of town on a heavy recovery call. When they told me what had happened, I turned my truck around and came right back."

### Help For His Son

When Glen Mikel arrived at the accident site, the Department of Transportation had blocked off a traffic lane and was pouring salt and sand on the icy roadway for traction. An ambulance had rolled up, joining the police cruiser already on scene. The EMTs were preparing to move Jarrid to the ambulance.

Glen helped carry his son's stretcher over the jersey barrier, rolled it into the ambulance, and watched as the doors closed. The EMTs triggered the siren and the ambulance moved slowly

away, its tires crunching on the frozen asphalt.

Jarrid was being transported to the nearby Iowa Methodist Medical Center. As he made his way to the hospital, Glen received a phone call from his wife, who was already there. "They've just sent the chaplain in to Jarrid's room," she said. Glen's mood, already glum, took another hit. "To me, that meant Jarrid was a goner," recalled Glen.

Fortunately it was a false alarm. Glen's wife Susan called back and said that rather than delivering last rites, the chaplain was actually functioning as an advocate for trauma patients. He had been sent into Jarrid's room to counsel the injured tower, not to say goodbye.

Glen reached the hospital and found Jarrid's surgeon. "He told me that Jarrid had broken both tibias and his left fibia," Glen recalled. "His pelvis was cracked, he had nicked his spleen, and some of his teeth were chipped." The surgical staff inserted titanium rods into Jarrid's legs, then placed him in traction, where he remained for several months. Friends and family visited him constantly while he recovered in the hospital.

"He had good support," said Glen, who had the family barber come to the hospital to give Jarrid a haircut. "People would get him out of bed and push him around the hospital in his wheelchair." One day when Jarrid was out and about, one of his friends brought glow-in-the-dark stars and put them all over the walls of his hospital room. When Jarrid went to sleep that night, he turned out the light and the star stick-



Phillip McCorquodale (left), Jason Cooke's boss

ers lit up all around the room — a warm reminder from the people who cared about him.

### Tough Love Helped

Concerned that his son might not walk again, Glen took a tough-love approach to the recovery process. "I felt that it was my job to keep him pissed off and aggravated at me," said Glen, "to give him something to feed on instead of his injuries." To exercise his son's injured legs, Glen alternated placing tongue depressors on Jarrid's toes. Jarrid, feeling the wooden instrument on his feet, would wriggle his toes in response. Glen also brought his family's

two therapy dogs — specially trained to help those in recovery — into the hospital to visit Jarrid.

As the weeks went on, Jarrid was determined to get back on his feet, and his father encouraged him in that direction. "Don't listen to what the doctors tell you," Glen would say to his son. "You just keep working and you do it. There isn't anything you can't do. You just keep trying until you get what you want."

When he was released to return home, Jarrid began physical therapy. "The worker's compensation people made our house handicapped-accessible for him," said Glen. But the bone marrow that had been injected into one

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of his legs didn't take, and he had to return to the hospital for another marrow transplant. The doctors weren't too hopeful about his chances; his legs were so badly damaged that they didn't think he would walk under his own power again.

Jarrid, though discouraged, wasn't about to give up. "He wasn't about to sit at home in a wheelchair," said Glen.

As part of his recovery, Jarrid was outfitted with removable casts. Before Glen realized it, his son had taken his casts off and was driving around town. "He just kept going," said Glen. "When we first got him home, he was driving around in a blizzard in the Explorer, helping out the other towers where he could. He was always involved in towing and didn't want to be away from it."

### A Separate Struggle

Meanwhile Glen fought a different battle for his son. The company that supplied worker's compensation insurance for Mikel and his employees burned through their cash reserves and decided to stop insuring tow companies due to the risk involved. "That put us out looking for worker's compensation insurance because of a claim that wasn't our fault," said Glen. "Being down a man and having to pay high worker's compensation rates was a real inconvenience to us."

Soon Glen found a smaller company that was willing to continue the insurance. Unfortunately, the problem still persisted: Even though the original insurer was eventually reimbursed for

the claim by the party responsible for the accident, "We as towers are still stuck with high rates even though it wasn't something we did," explains Glen.

When it looked like Jarrid's worker's compensation would be unable to cover the costs of his recovery, the members of Tow411.net conducted a pledge drive that netted more than \$1500. When he found out that insurance would offset his medical costs after all, Jarrid asked that the money collected in his name be donated to the Survivor Fund administered by the Towing & Recovery Hall of Fame & Museum in Chattanooga.

Looking back, what happened to Jarrid was an unfortunate, but preventable, accident, caused by a careless driver who ignored what was right in front of him. "The guy in the pickup was driving too fast for the weather conditions," said Glen. "The pickup came screaming down the road and lost control. Jarrid didn't have a clue that it was going to happen."

Today, Jarrid's legs are still scarred from the accident, but he's back on the road, running heavy-duty operations for G&S Service/I-80 Towing. Despite some tough times, he refuses to let the accident slow him down. "He was certified by the Towing & Recovery Association of America at age 14," said Glen. "He recently completed heavy-duty and rotator school with Wes Wilburn."

And Jarrid is just shy of 23 years old. "He continues to work every day," said Glen. "He knows he's lucky to be around." ❄



Walt Phillips

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# SHORT HAULS

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

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.

Now you can search back issues of Footnotes! Looking for a person, place, thing, or story that ran in a past issue of Footnotes? Just go to [www.trfootnotes.com](http://www.trfootnotes.com) and enter in the search box a word, name, or whatever else you are looking for. Then hit "search" and see what you find! Happy hunting!

See Footnotes' new TowBlog at [www.trfootnotes.com](http://www.trfootnotes.com) by clicking on the "TowBlog" icon. TowBlog features towing and recovery news, announcements, opinion, and other information of interest, including humor, all gleaned from the World Wide Web, press releases, and other sources.

We also suggest checking out Vermont towman Rod West's blog "Towing Notes" at <http://towingnotes.blogspot.com/>

**Miller Foundation donation.** The Miller Family Foundation has gifted \$50,000 gift to the International Towing and Recovery Hall of Fame and Museum (ITRHFAM). The check was presented by the foundation's representative, Will Miller, to George Connolly, the ITRHFAM chairperson, in August. The funds will be used for the bronze plaques on the Wall of the Fallen Memorial that display the names of individuals in the towing and recovery industry who have lost their lives in the line of service and ongoing maintenance of the Wall. The unveiling of the

first set of names on the memorial was held in September, a year after the Wall itself was dedicated.

For more information on the ITRHFAM and the Wall, visit [www.internationaltowingmuseum.org](http://www.internationaltowingmuseum.org) or call 423-267-3132.



**New training school.** towPartners announced a new towing industry training school called "Tow Institute." The goal of Tow Institute is to bring together Field Operations training with hands-on instruction and business management training. Tow Institute is operated by towPartners and is sponsored by Jerr-Dan Corporation, Sprint Nextel Corporation, and Aramark Uniform Services.

Students will register for a preferred study track, plus a variety of elective classes, during the two-day educational sessions (Friday/Saturday or Saturday/Sunday) that will launch in 2008. Five events have been scheduled:

- March 14-16 in Phoenix, AZ
- May 2-4 in Philadelphia, PA
- July 11-13 in St. Louis, MO
- September 5-7 in Seattle, WA
- October 17-19 in Atlanta, GA



Will Miller (right) presents the check to George Connolly

Classes are open to towing operators, business owners, managers, office staff and any others interested in the towing industry. Instructors include Rick Chron, John Borowski, Michele Godwin, Jeb Blount, Grant MacQuilkan, and Jeffrey Godwin.

The class registration fee is \$595 per student. If there are three or more students registering, the fee is reduced to \$500 per student. The class fee covers classes, workshops, handouts, breakfast, lunch and evening receptions.

Learn more about Tow Institute at [www.towinstitute.com](http://www.towinstitute.com). Learn more about towPartners at [www.towPartners.com](http://www.towPartners.com).

**100 members.** A year after its formation, Southwest Tow Operators has announced that it now has 100 members following the San Antonio Tow Expo in early August. During the show, the group hosted a compliance seminar concerning the new Texas Towing Act. Representatives from the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation or TDLR presented an overview of the legislation received in June. Harriet Cooley, Executive Director for the Towing and Recovery Association of America, was also present to cover information on the newly-required driver certifications. A videotape of the presentation will be available to association members and an update will be given by the TDLR at the April 2008 San Antonio Tow Expo.

For more information, contact Joann Messina by email to [joann@swautotow.com](mailto:joann@swautotow.com) or call 972-247-9454. Learn more about the Southwest Tow Operators at [www.swtowop.org](http://www.swtowop.org).

**2007 Tow Woman of the Year.** Angela Roper, owner of TIPTOW of Georgetown, TX, has been named as the 2007 Tow Woman of the Year by the Women of the Towing and Recovery Association of America or WTRAA. Roper, a TRAA Nationally Certified Level 1 tower, is currently serving as the WTRAA's Secretary and was elected as the TRAA's Third Vice-President this year.

Roper also serves on the TRAA's Education Foundation Board and is the chairperson for the new TRAA Safety Video committee. She is a member of the International Towing and Recovery Hall of Fame and Museum Survivor Fund committee and has served on the WTRAA's scholarship committee for several years.

Working with other towing professionals, Roper helped to form the Towing Education Council or TEC this year. The TEC was created to educate and prepare towers throughout the country for certification and the first class began in September at Austin Community College in Austin, TX.

Roper has served as the Texas Towing and Storage Association's treasurer and was its Executive Director for three years. She is a licensed American Traffic Safety Services Association (ATSSA) instructor and a Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Officer Standards and Education (TCLEOSE) Basic Instructor.

Roper was honored in Chattanooga, TN in September. Learn more about the WTRAA at <http://www.towserver.net/about/wtraa.htm>.

**Lawsuit filed.** The guardian of the 21-year old tow truck driver whose truck was caught in the steam pipe explosion at the end of July in Manhattan has filed a suit against the New York City utility company, Con Edison. Gregory McCullough suffered severe burns to the majority of his body and remains hospitalized. McCullough's passenger Judith Bailey was also injured, but has since been released from the hospital. Bailey has also filed a suit against Con Edison.

Condensed from an 8/8/07 Associated Press story in USA Today. Read the full story online at: [http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2007-08-08-ny\\_blast\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2007-08-08-ny_blast_N.htm).

**Lawsuit dropped.** The attorney for the family of former St. Louis Cardinals pitcher Josh Hancock, who died in April after crashing into the back of a stopped tow truck, has withdrawn the wrongful death lawsuit against the tow truck driver and the towing company. The lawsuit, filed in May by Hancock's father, also listed the restaurant where Hancock was drinking prior to the incident, the restaurant's manager, and the motorist with the disabled vehicle who was being helped by the tow truck driver, Jacob Hargrove.

Condensed from a 7/31/07 story by Todd C. Frankel in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch. Read the full story online at: <http://www.stltoday.com/stltoday/news/stories.nsf/stlouiscitycounty/story/3532081B70FFCBF286257329000F8DA4?OpenDocument>.

**Heroic tow truck driver.** Don Atkinson of Ace Garage and Wheeling, WV and police officers went to the assistance of a man trapped in a burning vehicle. Disregarding the risks to their own safety, the five men stayed with the accident victim and protected him from the flames as best they could until firefighters arrived to put out the blaze and extricated the badly injured man.

Condensed from an 8/18/07 story in The Intelligencer. Read the article online at: <http://www.theintelligencer.net/page/content.detail/id/51909.html>.

**CA towmen honored.** The California Highway Patrol awarded certificates of commendation to tow truck drivers Leon Vires and Michael Winter in August. The two towmen, who work for Ahearn's Towing in Sonora, CA, came to the assistance of Officer Mike Rimmel after he was struck by a car on the highway in January 2006. Rimmel lost both legs as a result of the incident, but is still working for the CHP.

Condensed from an 8/08/07 story by BJ Hansen on MyMotherLode.com. Read the article at: <http://www.mymotherlode.com/News/article/kvml/1186608608>.

**Vandals strike "Tow Tater."** Tow Tater, the 1951 International boom truck that inspired the tow truck character "Mater" in the 2006 Pixar animated movie Cars, was vandalized at its Route 66 gas station in Galena, KS in August. The truck's windshield was shot four times.

Condensed from a post on Route 66 News. Read the story at: <http://rwarn-17588.wordpress.com/2007/08/12/tow-tater-vandalized/>. ☘



# ON THE MOVE

## Man On The Move

*Chuck Schmidt tows locally while networking nationally*

By Cindy M. McMahon

Chuck Schmidt is one tower who can rack up the miles – and not just around town. A quick look at his calendar proves the point.

In one month, Schmidt traveled from his home state of New York to Washington, DC for the Towing and Recovery Association of America (TRAA) board meeting and Legislative & Leadership Conference. Then it was on to Tennessee for the International Towing and Recovery Hall of Fame and Museum's board meeting in Chattanooga.

From there, it was Las Vegas for the American Towing Alliance Tower Advisory Group (TAG) board meeting, followed by a stint in South Carolina for a towers' retreat in Myrtle Beach. Finally, he returned to Albany, NY for the Empire State Towing and Recovery Association (ESTRA) board meeting.

And all that was in addition to running his business — Charles Schmidt & Sons, Inc. located in Roslyn on Long Island, NY.

### Group Therapy

Schmidt credited mentors in the industry with getting him interested in professional associations. "My friend Joel Merksamer was president of the Professional Wrecker Operators Association (PWOA) of Long Island when he asked me to get involved years ago," Schmidt said. "That was my first foray into the associations."

Schmidt noted that he finds that these organizations can be very useful, but very political. "I minimize the political aspect and find them to be helpful for networking, even therapeutic," he explained. "You find others are having the same issues you are. Towers are a small group, but we are a



Chuck Schmidt on the job

close-knit group. We live the same lifestyle, day to day."

Schmidt became the TRAA board member from New York in 1985. He held that position until 1998 when he became TRAA treasurer, a job he still holds today. Schmidt became the Long Island regional director on the ESTRA board in 1984, and then went on to be vice president and president. He has served on many TRAA committees, as well as the board of the Hall of Fame and Museum in Chattanooga.

### Learning & Earning

Schmidt's life of dedication to towing and recovery began when he was seven years old. His father, Charles Schmidt, Sr., opened a service station

in 1961 on the exact location where the company still operates. The senior Schmidt added towing service within a few months.

"My father realized there was a need in the area," Schmidt said. "He got an International with a hand-crank boom. In 1963, he bought a new Chevrolet with a Weld Built boom. That was state-of-the-art before hydraulics."

Schmidt's father, who at 82 still works in the family business every day, would not let his son drive a tow truck until he was 18. That is also when he started college at St. Bonaventure University in southwestern New York, majoring in business administration.

"My parents tried to discourage me from going into the towing business,"

See MAN ON THE MOVE, page 10



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## MAN ON THE MOVE

continued from page 9

Schmidt said. "They said, 'Go to college, and then we'll back you in whatever career you decide on.' I knew even then that I wanted to grow the family business."

### Cowboy Country

Schmidt said that he has seen college classmates aspire to work in office positions, doing the same thing each day. "That would have killed me," he said. "I could not have fit into that role."

"Everyone should aspire to as much education as they can, but that doesn't mean you have to conform," Schmidt noted. "The towing industry gives you the opportunity to achieve but not necessarily conform. We're the last true cowboys in this country. We're not beholden to corporate America. We get to work with people, work outside, and with new challenges every hour."

*"We're the last true cowboys in this country"*

After college, Schmidt returned home, degree in hand, and set about modernizing the family business. He computerized the company in the early '80s. "We were one of the first in the New York area to have computer-aided dispatch. We were the first to have mobile dispatch units in our trucks," Schmidt said. "I helped develop the business into a business-business and not a fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants business."

### Keeping Control

By 2001, Schmidt & Sons had grown, thanks to some acquisitions and large-volume car dealership customers. "We peaked at ten trucks," Schmidt said, "and then things started to get a little out of control."

He advised others to learn from his mistakes. "You need to plan your growth, plan your expansion. Your

infrastructure may not be able to handle the growth," he said. "You need good systems in place or you can quickly lose control of a business."

Today, the company has five trucks: one heavy-duty 1999 Peterbilt with a Century 5025; one medium-duty International with a Vulcan 897 16-ton unit; a light-duty Jerr-Dan HPL-35 on a 2005 Ford F-450; two International carriers. He added, "I swear by International chassis. It's my chassis of choice. I've had about 16 of them over the years."

His two flatbeds with their 21-foot Century Right Approach decks are designed for vehicles with low ground clearance that usually come with an expensive price tag. "It's the only way to move high-end vehicles. No one else in our area was doing that and we immediately had credibility." Schmidt now specializes in this type of towing, having cut back on motor club work.

### Just Say No

"Our marketing plan is solid now," Schmidt said, with a focus on customers shopping for service, not price. "We concentrate on customers who say 'How soon?' not 'How much?'"

Schmidt said he "finally realized that it is not a sin to say no to a customer. Some customers are just not in your normal mix and it would be an unsafe situation. You actually make money by not taking the job."

Schmidt & Sons has four full-time employees and about as many part-timers. "We get a lot done with a small number of people," Schmidt pointed out. "My crew is very good and is experienced and well-paid."

Schmidt's company covers the northern Nassau County area on Long Island, 20 miles east of Manhattan, but runs trucks in the tri-state area of New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut.

His exuberance for his profession keeps him rolling. "You might drive 50 miles, change an old lady's tire, tow a school bus so kids can get to school. There are so many opportunities for satisfaction. You can change something from disaster to success in 15 minutes, and you may have that opportunity ten times a day," Schmidt said. "I find this business so amazing, so exhilarating."

See HANDS ON THE WHEEL, page 11



Schmidt at the Towing & Recovery Museum

# Hands On The Wheel

Schmidt's cross-country commitments have garnered him friends throughout the industry, including Scott Burrows, owner of Burrows Wrecker Service in Pendleton, KY. "I first met Chuck at one of the TRAA Legislative and Leadership Conferences in Washington, DC about seven or eight years ago," Burrows said. "What immediately struck me was his New York accent — and the fact that he was extremely knowledgeable about the issues confronting towing companies.

"Here was a man who didn't talk like me — a Bronx brogue compared to a Kentucky twang — but he thought like

me. I was also struck by the fact that his willingness to serve outweighed his need for personal recognition or gain."

Burrows also recalled Schmidt's "brief servitude as a tour bus driver. Several of us attended a TRAA meeting in Springfield, MA, and Chuck acted as bus driver and tour guide as he shepherded a load of us around Boston. Here's a guy from New York, driving with one hand on the wheel and pointing out landmarks with the other. I would compare this to his service for TRAA: one hand steering the interests of the nation's towing industry while keeping the other hand on his business."

# Very Odd Jobs

Schmidt has had his share of oddball experiences in the business. He has towed Zamboni ice resurfacers and even deposited a car in a Mercedes dealer's fountain so it looked like it was floating on the water. He even transported the "car" from the Flintstones movie. It had no tires and, Schmidt said, "It was made of fiberglass and impossible to hook up. There was no way to

chain or strap it. It was a logistical nightmare."

Since many major motion pictures are filmed in New York City, Schmidt has done towing for celebrities and producers, including for Robert De Niro recently for the film The Good Shepherd. "We transport cars to the sets and then haul them away after they are wrecked," Schmidt said.

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279344 2007 Chevy 5500 - White, 6.6L, Duramax, Automatic, Spring Ride, Hyd. Brakes, 19.5, 26,000 GVW, Jerr-Dan Baltimore show truck, one of a kind, 21' Aluminum NGAR, Autoloader, wireless remote.

279765 2007 Chevy K3500 - White/Red, 6.6L Duramax, Automatic Jerr-Dan MPL40d, T37 L Arms, Tunnel box, Trebron stifflegs / Remote.

279766 2007 Chevy K3500 XCab - White/Silver, 8.1L Automatic, Jerr-Dan HPL35, 408S, Std. L Arms.

272633 2007 Sterling Acterra White 210 HP Mercedes, Auto, Air ride, Air brake, 22.5s, Jerr-Dan 21' WSRB Red Steel bed

272699 2007 Sterling Acterra Maroon 210 HP Mercedes, Auto, Air ride, Air brake, 22.5s, Jerr-Dan 21' Steel SLPB dual angle



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# Monster Truck



Rob Drager

What? Another monster truck claiming to be the biggest ever (and they could be right)! I know there are some made in the U.S. that claim to be able to lift 100 tons (200,000 pounds) but I have yet to see a truck that has actually been tested to 206,080-pounds lift on the boom, but this is what Syren Engineering of Stourport in the UK has accomplished.

This beautifully designed truck, the Syren 2000 rotator, is finished to a very high degree and incorporates two winches on the boom and two on the chassis so its pull is big! Add to this the unique outriggers and the big front-mounted winch on the front of this five-axle Volvo Globetrotter and you have a truly formidable machine.

— Bill Jackson

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"A BID ABOVE THE REST"

# THE GEAR MART

New & improved equipment from industry innovators

Email [bcandler@traderonline.com](mailto:bcandler@traderonline.com) about your new or improved tow truck chassis and bodies, towing parts and equipment, and accessories with any available photos or art and we'll include it here.

## Makes Loading Easy

The new Buzzbox Auto Un-Loader is a material handler ideal for discharging loads of any sort, from stone and mulch to plywood and construction debris. It features a live bed and power bulkhead with rear-accessible toggle switch, enabling the operator to control the speed and placement of material as it unloads.

With its integrated all-weather tarp cover, material remains intact and dry. The Auto Un-loader features a mounting system that plugs into any standard hitch receiver. When not in use, operators can single-handedly roll the Auto Un-loader out of the truck using its four removable caster jacks, where the machine can stand in storage.

The Auto Un-loader fits most three-quarter ton and one-ton pick-up trucks, and is also available in a smaller version designed for compact trucks. Call 906-482-7015 or visit [www.buzzboxaction.com](http://www.buzzboxaction.com)

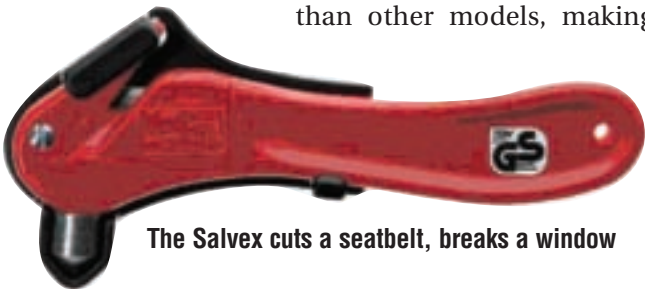


The Auto Un-Loader makes material handling easy

## Cutters & Breakers

Martor USA offers a line of safety seatbelt cutters and window breakers to release trapped and/or injured accident victims with the greatest possible efficiency on dry land or under water.

The Salvex has a sharp blade encased within the tool to prevent laceration to your hands or body but can efficiently cut through a seatbelt. It also has a hardened steel window-breaking spike and includes a mounting plate for interior installation. The Ruck-Zuck and the SOS Cutter also safely and efficiently cut through seatbelts. See <http://martorusa.com>.



The Salvex cuts a seatbelt, breaks a window

them easier to lift and carry. Key components like spindle assemblies and trip assemblies can be repaired on the spot, which translates into nearly almost no down time and repair bills. Each dolly includes two side frames, two axles, and a jack bar. You can choose between 72-inch, fixed-length steel or aluminum axles or telescoping steel axles. Visit [www.awdirect.com](http://www.awdirect.com)

## Lightweight Dollies

Each side frame of these dollies from AW Direct is 20 percent lighter than other models, making

The lightweight aluminum modular sides with a spacious, lighted tool compartment give the Prowler versatility as well as a sleek look. The LED lighting package will keep the Prowler well-illuminated in the toughest conditions for your safety. For more information, visit [www.dancoproducts.com](http://www.dancoproducts.com).

## Automatic Tire Inflation

Hendrickson Trailer Suspension Systems introduces TireMaxx CP (Constant Pressure), a new configuration of its popular automatic tire inflation system for trailers. The TireMaxx systems draw from the

trailer air supply to help keep trailer tires properly inflated and rolling smoothly.

TireMaxx CP continually checks tire pressure without pressurizing the axle or wheel ends and employs a pneumatic controller to direct air to tires that fall below a preset pressure level. A signal light illuminates only when attention is required to alert the operator of tire or system leaks. The CP requires no special tools to adjust tire pressure settings and operates on either 12- or 24-volt electrical systems.

A Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) study found seven percent of all tires underinflated

## New From Danco

Danco has added new, powerful 12-ton integrated wreckers to its line. The Prowler will easily tow small compact cars to medium-duty trucks. Standard features include dual 12,000-pound planetary winches, heavy-duty boom construction, and stiff legs with flipper feet for tough recoveries.



Danco's new Prowler



A lighter dolly from AWDirect

# THE GEAR MART

New & improved equipment from industry innovators



Tiremaxx's automatic tire inflator

ed by 20 psi or more and about 56 percent below or above their target pressure by more than five psi. The study noted that improper tire inflation may lead to compromised braking, poor handling, and reduced stability. See [www.hendrickson-intl.com](http://www.hendrickson-intl.com) or call 866-743-3247.

### Brighter Lights

Truck-Lite announces the new Super 80 LED Interior Trailer lamps, a new line of brighter, white LED lamps designed to be direct replacements for most popular sizes and shapes. The rugged aluminum housing weighs in at only two pounds

and its small size provides more clearance for loads or loading equipment. The lamp's 10 LEDs also eliminate problems of low voltage. The Super 80 lamp is up to four times brighter than incandescent lamps it replaces. See [www.truck-lite.com](http://www.truck-lite.com) or call 716-665-6214.

### Crane Load Indicator

Hirschmann Automation and Control has introduced the iVISOR mentor load

moment indicator (LMI) for mobile cranes. It provides the crane operator with a graphic display of the crane and the current load and geometric information, including the actual and allowable load, boom length, boom angle, and load radius. The display also includes an integrated bar graph which provides the operator with information on the crane's utilization.

The LMI is in one compact unit for easy installation and it can be networked with other controls and displays. Call 717-217-2216, email [Gary.Peck@hirschmann-usa.com](mailto:Gary.Peck@hirschmann-usa.com), or visit [www.hirschmann-usa.com](http://www.hirschmann-usa.com)

### Zip's Winner

Hitz Towing of York, Nebraska won Zip's Car Carrier of the Year Award for their 2007 International 4300 Extended Cab and Century 21-foot Aluminum Car Carrier. Hitz's carrier has an SP8000 Sidepuller, Sidepull 2000, and radio remote control for versatility and ease of use. Four large, fully customized aluminum toolboxes provide efficient storage while the extra lighting adds visibility and safety.



## Fleet Management

Vericom offers an Internet fleet management package to help towers get paid for every tow by capturing each PTO activation and reduce fuel consumption by monitoring speeds and routes while expediting dispatching to the next tow. The towing/transport package includes the following: real-time vehicle locator, live mapping, ignition report, mileage report, speeding report, stop report, maintenance report and PTO report. There is no charge for installation, no equipment cost, and the PTO monitoring sensor is included for free. Call 813-769-4144; cell 813-917-1097 or visit [bdelmoral@vericomtech.com](mailto:bdelmoral@vericomtech.com)

The Professional Towing & Recovery Operators of Illinois (PTROI) chose Hitz Towing as the overall winner. In recognition of this assistance from PTROI, Zip's has made a \$500 donation in the organization's name to the International Towing and Recovery Hall of Fame and Museum's Survivor's Fund.

Voting for other truck categories is coming so on. You can vote by visiting [Zips.com](http://Zips.com) and clicking on the Owner's Club link. Zip's owners who purchase a new carrier from Zip's become Gold Level Zip's Owners Club members and qualify for the Zip's award in their category. 🚛



Truck-Lite's new interior trailer lamps



Zip's Car Carrier of the Year Winner

# THE BOTTOM LINE

## A Profitable Partner

*Starting small, he helps the industry save millions*

By Alison Johnson

Jeffrey Godwin came into the towing industry purely by accident. Even then, he assumed it would be a temporary gig.

Back in 1993, Godwin was working as a dispatch manager for a courier company in Texas that happened to have a light-duty towing business housed in the same building. On nights and weekends, the eight-truck tow company used the 65-truck courier company's dispatch service to take calls.

When Godwin decided to leave his job over frustrations with the company's computer system, he approached the owner of the tow business about joining his new venture. The answer was yes, and Godwin gave his two-weeks notice that same day. A day after that, early in 1994, they launched operations in another building with little but the

eight trucks they had on the road.

"We literally ran the trucks with a cell phone, a hand-held radio, a stack of paper and a pen," Godwin said. "I did every job there was – office manager, dispatcher, accounting, customer service, you name it. I'd be there from 4:30 a.m. until 7 p.m. at least six days a week. I learned a little bit of everything about the towing industry, and it has been incredibly good to me ever since."

### Growth Pattern

Thirteen years later, Godwin has grown from a jack-of-all-trades at a small company to a businessman with national towing-related interests. As co-owner of towXchange, towPartners and several other ventures, he offers software solutions and a financial savings program to tens of thousands of towers. The 38-year-old Texan



Michele and Jeff Godwin

describes himself as a workaholic who often is still answering customer emails at 10 p.m.

"He's very personable, very nice, and more than anything, just extremely hard-working," said Ed Hefter, chief executive officer of D&E Road Service in New Jersey and a Gold Member of towPartners.

The towPartners concept, launched more than six years ago, has made Godwin a familiar name to towers.

Discounts from more than 30 popular supplier partners, including Aramark, Sprint Nextel, Dell, and Office Depot, will save the industry an estimated \$11 million this year, Godwin said.

Hefter, for example, has cut 13 percent off the cost of each of his six Nextel phones. "It's obvious that he cares a lot about the towing industry and knows what will help people most," Hefter said of Godwin. "If you take advantage of the program, you



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 <p><b>4X4</b></p> <p>#4488W - 2007 CHEVROLET C5500 WITH A VULCAN 894, 6.6 DURAMAX DIESEL, ALLISON AUTO, 108CA, PWR W/L, CRUISE, AC, TILT, AM/FM/CD, KEYLESS ENTRY, REMOTE MIRRORS, 19,500 GVW, AIR RIDE SEAT, 4X4, FEDERAL SOLARIS LED, DUAL 10,00LB WINCHES, SS BODY, 1 SET TOW FORKS, VULCAN TOW SLING, J HOOKS AND CHAINS.</p>	<p>Choose your color - We have them ALL</p>  <p>#9855W - 2002 CHEVROLET C6500 EXT CAB WITH A 21' CENTURY STEEL, 210CAT DIESEL, 6-SPD, A/C, 25,950GVW, REMOVABLE RAILS, AM/FM/CASS, 144"CA, 3000LB VULCAN WHEELIFT, PWR W/L, CRUISE, TILT, 48" TOOLBOX W/SS DOORS, SCOPES, SS SIMULATORS, CHAIN PACKAGE.</p>	<p><b>AIR RIDE</b></p>  <p>#4345W - 2007 CHEVROLET C6500 W/ A 21' CENTURY STEEL, WITH ALUM BLADE RAILS, 7.8L DIESEL, ALLISON AUTO, AIR RIDE PWR W/L, CRUISE, TILT, A/C, 25,950GVW, CHROME FRONT BUMPER, REMOTE MIRRORS, 48" TOOLBOX W/SS DOORS, GALVANIZED SUB FRAME, 3-WAY PIVOTING L-ARMS, AIR RIDE SEAT, 35 GAL DUAL FUEL TANKS, UPPER/LOWER WORK LIGHTS</p>	 <p>#4495W - 2006 VULCAN 810 STAINLESS STEEL MOUNTED ON A F-450, 6.0 DIESEL, AUTO, XLT, POWER SEAT, AM/FM/CD, CRUISE, AC, TILT, PWR W/L, RUNNING BOARDS, 60"CA, 17,500GVW, AUTO LOAD, SS SIMULATORS, 2 TOOLBOXES, LOWER WORK LIGHTS.</p>	
 <p>#4412W - 2007 CHEVROLET C6500 W/ A 21' VULCAN ALUMINUM 7.8L DIESEL, ALLISON AUTO, PWR W/L, CRUISE, TILT, AC, 25,950 GVW, REMOVABLE RAILS, CHROME FRONT BUMPER, REMOTE MIRRORS, 48" TOOLBOX W/SS DOOR, SS SIMULATORS, 144"CA, GALVANIZED SUB FRAME, SCOPES, UPPER/LOWER WORK LIGHTS, AIR RIDE SEAT, 35 GAL DUAL FUEL TANKS.</p>	<p><b>EXT CAB</b></p>  <p>#9855W - 2002 CHEVROLET C6500 EXT CAB WITH A 21' CENTURY STEEL, 210CAT DIESEL, 6-SPD, A/C, 25,950GVW, REMOVABLE RAILS, AM/FM/CASS, 144"CA, 3000LB VULCAN WHEELIFT, PWR W/L, CRUISE, TILT, 48" TOOLBOX W/SS DOORS, SCOPES, SS SIMULATORS, CHAIN PACKAGE.</p>	 <p>#4073W - 2007 CHEVROLET C5500 WITH A 21' VULCAN STEEL, 6.6 DURAMAX DIESEL 300HP, ALLISON AUTO, PWR W/L, CRUISE, A/C, TILT, AM/FM/CD, 138"CA, SCOPES, AIR RIDE SEAT, KEYLESS ENTRY, REMOVABLE RAILS, SS SIMULATORS, 48" TOOLBOX W/SS DOOR, GALVANIZED SUB FRAME, UPPER/LOWER WORK LIGHTS.</p>	<p><b>4X4 Only 19,000 miles</b></p>  <p>#6025W - 2006 GMC 3500 4X4 WITH A CHEVRON REBEL TWIN LINE, EXTENDABLE BOOM STAINLESS STEEL SELF LOADER, SS SIMULATORS, PUSH BUMPER DURAMAX DIESEL, 365HP, PWR WINDOW/LOCKS, 6-SPEED, ONLY 19,000 MILES WAS OVER \$70,000 NEW, CALL FOR PRICING.</p>	<p><b>Available in black, white, gray, blue &amp; red</b></p>  <p>#4515W - 2007 CHEVROLET C5500 WITH A 21' VULCAN STEEL, 325HP V8 GAS, ALLISON AUTO, PWR W/L, SOLID RAIL, AC, CRUISE, TILT, 138" CA, SS SIMULATORS, 48" TOOLBOX W/SS DOOR, REMOTE MIRRORS, AIR RIDE SEAT, KEYLESS ENTRY, REMOTE MIRRORS, CHROME BUMPER CHAIN PKG, UPPER/LOWER WORK-LIGHTS, AM/FM/CD, 19,500GVW.</p>
<p><b>5 Winch Option 75 Ton</b></p>  <p>#1075W - 2007 CENTURY 1075 S2 75 TON 3 STAGE ROTATOR EXTENDED DAY CAB T800 WITH A 5 WINCH OPTION, CUMMINS ISX565 WITH JAKE BRAKE, FULLER 18 SPEED, 228CA, WHEEL LIFT 55,000 LBS RETRACTED - 17,000 LBS EXTENDED, WHELEN 72 LIGHTBAR, 50,000 LB SIDE BY SIDE 25PD PLANETARY WINCHES, DUAL FUEL TANKS, ALCOA WHEELS, 8 FUNCTION REMOTE, REAR VISION CAMERA, PASSENGER CONTROLS.</p>	 <p>#4591W - 2007 CHEVROLET C3500 EXT CAB WITH A VULCAN 810 COMPOSITE, 6.6 DURAMAX DIESEL 365HP, ALLISON 6-SPEED AUTO, PWR W/L, CRUISE, TILT, AM/FM/CD, A/C, AUTO START, PWR SLIDING REAR WINDOW, CODE 3 EXCALIBUR LIGHT BAR, SS SIMULATORS.</p>	 <p>#6023W - 2006 CHEVROLET C6500 WITH A 21' VULCAN STEEL, 7.8 DURAMAX DIESEL, ALLISON AUTO, PWR W/L, CRUISE, A/C, TILT, AM/FM/CD, 144"CA, SCOPES, AIR RIDE SEAT, KEYLESS ENTRY, REMOVABLE RAILS, SS SIMULATORS, 2-48" TOOLBOX W/SS DOOR, GALVANIZED SUB FRAME, UPPER/LOWER WORK LIGHTS, 25,950GVW, REMOTE MIRRORS, CHAIN PKG, CHROME BUMPER.</p>	 <p>#4376W - 2007 CHEVROLET C6500 WITH A 21' CENTURY STEEL, 7.8 DURAMAX DIESEL, ALLISON AUTO, PWR W/L, CRUISE, A/C, TILT, AM/FM/CD, 144"CA, 3-WAY PIVOTING L-ARMS, AIR RIDE SEAT, KEYLESS ENTRY, REMOVABLE RAILS, SS SIMULATORS, 1-48" TOOLBOX W/SS DOOR, GALVANIZED SUB FRAME, UPPER/LOWER WORK LIGHTS, 25,950GVW, REMOTE MIRRORS, CHAIN PKG, CHROME BUMPER.</p>	
 <p>#9761W - 2003 IHC 4300 EXT CAB, WITH A 21' JERR DAN, DT466 220HP, AUTOMATIC, AC, 144" CA, AM/FM/CD, 25,500 GVW, PWR W/L, CRUISE, TILT, AIR RIDE SEAT, DUAL 45 GAL FUEL TANKS, STATIONARY PYLON, UPPER/LOWER WORK LIGHTS, SS SIMULATORS, L-ARMS, 2-48" TOOLBOXES, BLADE RAILS.</p>	<p><b>4X4 INDY RACE TRUCK</b></p>  <p>4497W - 2007 CHEVROLET C5500 4X4 INDY RACE TRUCK, WITH A VULCAN 892SS, 6.6 DURAMAX DIESEL, ALLISON AUTO, 84"CA, PWR W/L, AM/FM/CD, CRUISE, A/C, TILT, KEYLESS ENTRY, REMOTE MIRRORS, CORNER STROBES, PUSH BUMPER, SS TUNNEL BOX, ALUM. WHEELS, DIAMOND PLATE DRESS UP KIT, FRAME FORKS, HAND RAILS, WORK LIGHTS, HOT SHIFT PTO, IN DASH SWITCH PANEL.</p>	 <p>4346W - 2007 CHEVROLET C6500 WITH A 21' CENTURY STEEL, 7.8 DURAMAX DIESEL, ALLISON AUTO, PWR W/L, CRUISE, A/C, TILT, AM/FM/CD, 144"CA, 3-WAY PIVOTING L-ARMS, AIR RIDE SEAT, KEYLESS ENTRY, REMOVABLE RAILS, SS SIMULATORS, 1-48" TOOLBOX W/SS DOOR, GALVANIZED SUB FRAME, UPPER/LOWER WORK LIGHTS, 25,950GVW, REMOTE MIRRORS, CHAIN PKG, CHROME BUMPER.</p>	<p><b>V70 TOO MANY OPTIONS TO MENTION</b></p>  <p>#4869W - 2007 VULCAN V70 MOUNTED ON A KENWORTH T800 WITH A 38" SLEEPER, 565HP CUMMINS, 18-SPEED, 144" EURO STINGER, 54,320 GVW, 2-35,000LB 2-SPD WINCHES, AIR RIDE, SUN ROOF, TAIL BOARD REMOTE, REMOTE DRESS UP KIT, COLOR FLAT SCREEN CAMERA, BUS LIFT, 15 FUNCTION WIRELESS REMOTE.</p>	









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Jeff Godwin (right) talks business at towPartners' booth at a trade show

really can save a considerable amount of money."

### Harsh Reality

Originally from Virginia Beach, Godwin grew up as the only child of a father who owned a chain of auto parts stores and a mother who worked as a dental hygienist. His parents moved to Texas when he was in high school. After graduating, he took college courses in computer programming but never earned a degree. The

main problem, he admits, was all the required classes in other fields. "Don't make me take English," he said with a laugh. "I guess I don't like being told what I have to learn."

Godwin's first job after school was at the courier company, where he started as a driver before moving into customer service and then on to dispatch management. There, he got a taste of the 24/7 work of a tower.

Once he entered the towing business for real, he quickly saw the other harsh realities of trying to run a successful company. The lack of respect for the industry as a whole was glaring, he said, as was the frequent struggle to collect payments for work and the high cost of running a business. "In the courier business, we had charged more to move an envelope 10 miles on immediate service than the towing company could charge to move a car 10 miles on immediate service," he said. "That was truly shocking."

Godwin assisted in gradually growing the business to 20 trucks operating in Dallas and another 20 in Houston. His computer background also helped them introduce innovations such as electronic dispatch, at the time a new concept in the industry.

### Towing Ops

In early 1997, Godwin's career path shifted again when Miller Industries Inc. purchased his business and he became a regional information technology manager for the company's RoadOne national towing service. After



Godwin, (left) accepts a \$20,000 check from Sprint to the Survivor Fund

holding that job for about a year, he moved to the corporate office to serve as national IT manager for another two years. In that position, he managed computer and phone systems for more than 100 towing companies. He visited many of them personally.

When Miller divested RoadOne, Godwin and a partner, Jeff Pesnell, founded towXchange and bought the rights to TOPS, a towing operations software program they had helped build. They since have sold customized software products to customers throughout the United States and Canada.

The Chattanooga-based company's

overall goal is to use technology to improve communication between towers and their customers, partners, and employees. While Godwin won't say how many tow companies now use TOPS, the system has processed nine million towing calls to date.

With firsthand knowledge of the financial pressures of the business, Godwin and Pesnell then started towPartners (see [www.towPartners.com](http://www.towPartners.com)) to help towers save costs on basic items such as truck parts, tools, shop supplies, and paint. The program now

See A PROFITABLE PARTNER, page 16

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<p><b>2008 KENWORTH T300</b> New Hood Design for 2008! PACCAR 260 HP, Automatic, Air Ride Air Brake Century 21' Aluminum Carrier Stationary Headboard, Key Slots, LED Lights TOO MUCH TO LIST! See it on the web at <a href="http://www.lynch-chicago.com">www.lynch-chicago.com</a></p>	<p><b>2440C 2006 KENWORTH T300</b> Cummins, 6 Speed Century 4024, Aluminum Body, 190" CA LED Light Bar, Room for a Pusher.</p>	<p><b>1995 4900 DT 9SPD CHEVERON</b> 28" steel 3-4 car carrier 250,000 miles new cross-members on body</p>	<p><b>2007 IH 4300 DT466, AUTO7C</b> Vulcan 21' Steel Carrier - 102" WIDE BODY Galvanized Sub-Frame, Extra Keyslots, 2-Tool Boxes, Rotation Kit</p>
<p><b>1995 T800 475 CAT</b> 13 Speed, 275,000 miles 1998 Century 60 Ton Rotator w/SDU 2 Under lift Aluminum Boxes READY TO WORK!</p>	<p><b>C6500 GM CAT DIESEL</b> nomar 15 ton unit GREAT BUY</p>	<p><b>1990 KW T600</b> with a Challenger 20 Ton Integrated Boom</p>	<p><b>2008 FORD F450 6.4L</b> Power Stroke Auto, XLT Century 301 with a Composite Body</p>

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## A PROFITABLE PARTNER

continued from page 15

has more than 36,000 towing company members and is still growing.

### Members Benefit

Jerr-Dan Corporation recently began providing basic memberships to the entire industry, and towPartners is working on a new offering that would let towers earn points to redeem for purchases from suppliers.

*"The lack of respect for the industry was glaring"*

Members also get the quarterly towPartners *Advisor* magazine. The publication began as an eight-page Microsoft Word document, black and white and stapled together, before evolving into a glossy color magazine. "All credit goes to my creative team," Godwin said. "It's just one way that my staff makes me look good."

The *Advisor* magazine is part of Godwin's strong desire to see the industry reform itself, particularly with quality standards followed either by individual companies or associations. Drivers also need all the training and certification they can get to repair a battered public reputation, he said. "If we don't come up with standard business practices, somebody will regulate those things for this industry," he said. "When it comes to image, we need all the help we can get."

The *Advisor's* goal, he said, isn't to dictate standards but to share information on how businesses might both better themselves and improve their profitability. Recent articles have touched on ways to save on health plans for employees, reduce collection costs, manage remotely, train leaders, and spend less on fuel with equipment such as GPS and wireless technology.

In addition, free towPartners' initiatives include a legislative tool for researching towing laws nationwide, the towSearch program that connects potential customers with businesses, and towData, which allows members to enter calls from the Internet or trucks and run reports at the office and export data activity.

### A Helping Hand

Godwin has been active in industry efforts to help and protect towers and their families. Last year, he chaired both the Survivor Fund and Wall of the Fallen memorial committees at the International Towing & Recovery Hall of Fame and Museum. He continues to advocate for Move Over laws and to chair the Survivor Fund, which now has \$360,000 banked for quick payments to families of towers who have lost their lives.

"I've seen that if you take care of people in this industry, they certainly take care of you," Godwin said. "I have a mortgage to pay, sure, but what drives me and our company's decisions is what would be beneficial for the industry. We want to do things right and create products and services that have real value for people."

And towing has become a family affair for Godwin as well. His wife, Michele, is marketing director for the California Tow Truck Association. Together, the two run TowConsulting.com,

an industry business with offerings that include on-site seminars, business consulting services, and customized employee manuals.

Godwin works out of his home but travels frequently on business, although living out of a suitcase isn't his cup of tea. When he's not on the job, he enjoys spending time with Michele and their new miniature Dachshund puppy, Cocktail, as well as riding motorcycles and playing golf. He also enjoys watching NASCAR races. "I am an addict," he said.

But mainly he works; in fact, he can remember only three rounds of golf he's gotten to play in the past year — and one of them was cut short by rain! "I don't really do anything but work," he said. "Anyone who really knows me would say that."

So much for that temporary gig in towing. ☛

## Trying Times

Godwin's early years in towing gave him some unforgettable moments, such as the time a driver rolled an antique Rolls Royce off a flatbed and tore off its bumper. "I learned how much that bumper cost real quick," Godwin said. It had a hand-stitched leather insert from England, custom-made for a total cost of about \$7,000 to the company.

Then there was a crazy Saturday morning in 1995, just after a huge rainstorm had hit Dallas. Godwin came into the office at 8 a.m. and as soon as he opened the switchboard for calls, all 10 lines lit up. The company completed more than 120 calls that day with its eight trucks and Godwin alone in the office. "That," he said, "was a trying day."

## TOW TECH

# A Bright Idea

*Shining more light on the incident scene*

By Kellie K. Speed

Like any business owner, Pete Kitt, Jr. wears many different hats. In addition to being the president of both Pete Kitt Automotive Sales and Service and Lujan USA in Camillus, NY, Kitt is a problem-solver and product-innovator/developer.

Kitt's father, Pete Kitt, Sr., started the auto repair portion of the company in the early 1950s and added towing to supplement the work in the winter. As the oldest of the six children in his family, Kitt said he became involved with the business "as soon as I could sit in the passenger seat of a tow truck."

The family business evolved over the years, one thing leading to another, Kitt

said. "Interestingly enough, we got into the air conditioning business, which led us to installing air conditioners in cars," he explained. "It seemed to fit in well with the repair business. Then we got into selling shop equipment and we became one of the companies to start building shop equipment. We put up a website and started selling locally."

That sector of the business became Lujan USA, a manufacturer and wholesaler of automotive service equipment. Pete Kitt, Sr. serves as vice-president for both companies today.

According to Kitt, his products are simply practical, not designed by an engineer thinking like an engineer. "We think from a perspective of an end-user because we've been the end-user," he

pointed out. "We see them as solutions to problems we see in this (the automotive service) business."

### The Big Idea

A (literally) shining example of Kitt's philosophy is found in his recently introduced, professional-use light called the PODLight. "One day, we got an email from someone saying he had a product, but it sounded too good to be true and, when you think that, it's generally true," Kitt said. "It was a manufacturer of headlights in Spain and he was looking to expand the market domestically. Technically, it was a good product, but the marketing was poor. We did the marketing for the product and then we learned how we could make products for us, which is when we came up with the idea for the PODLight."

Over the years, Kitt had often heard operators griping about flashlights that did not work when they were needed. "Being in the towing and automotive industry, we had a lot of complaints already about lighting," Kitt said. "When a light dropped, the bulb would break or the heat from the lamp would melt and burn the plastic or your arm, the cords drag on the ground and track grease and when you're walking, the



ords get tangled. The headaches were numerous and obvious."

Based on his own towing experience and after visiting trade shows, Kitt decided this was an opportunity he could not pass up. "We thought it was a good idea to take an LED, alter the design and make a practical light, for not just towers, but anyone with the need of a light," he said.

### Designed For Duty

The name, explained Tim Welch, Lujan USA's sales manager, came from the PODLight's form. "It's the way it's shaped," he said. "It looks like a pod." The PODLight is cordless and can be used as a work light, a flashlight, and an emergency strobe. The light, which has a suggested retail price of \$79.95, will provide eight hours of cordless illumination as a worklight, 12 hours as a flashlight, and over 48 hours as a flashing safety strobe.

With his background in towing and automotive, Kitt said he thought of features that would benefit the tower. "For example," he said, "it has the design of a hexagon so it doesn't roll off the hood of a car. The handle is black so the dirt doesn't show up on it and the end cap is yellow so it reminds the tower if he has placed it down somewhere. The lens is made of polycarbonate so if you drop it on a concrete floor, the bulbs won't break."

The PODLight's 360-degree repositionable collar is magnetic and is equipped with a nylon hook for hanging. "The towers loved it because it eliminated a big headache for lighting. If you lift the hood, you need to hold a light and if you need to put on jumper cables, it was always difficult because you only have two hands," Kitt noted. "Towers generally had to lie the light on the ground or hold it in their mouth like a Mag-Lite. This light is great for those nighttime annoyances."

The PODLight also has a flash pattern, blinking twice and then pausing, making it useful for emergency situations. "Although we designed the PODLight with towers in mind, many other industries have shown interest," Kitt said. "People in the railroad industry have told us that it solves a lot of their headaches. Otis Elevator is looking at them for their repairmen and General Motors is also looking at purchasing some for their maintenance people in their production facilities."

### Long Life Light

Kitt learned that one of the most common problems for towers was that regular flashlights never seemed to work when they were actually needed because the batteries went dead.

"The PODLight is completely rechargeable so it is always charged and available when you need to use it," Kitt pointed out. "You can also leave it indefinitely in a lighter and not have to worry about it draining the battery of the truck. The unit has three nickel metal batteries and, when it is done charging, the built-in microprocessor shuts it off automatically, sensing that there is no more need for a charge."

See A BRIGHT IDEA, page 19

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**A BRIGHT IDEA**

continued from page 17

Kitt's tests on the PODLight have shown that a driver can leave the light plugged in in a truck over a weekend and the truck will still start on Monday. "It (the microprocessor) extends the life of the light and the batteries exponentially," he said. Durability tests also had gratifying results. "We had a 300-pound man stand on it and it didn't break," Kitt said, "so we backed a car over it." The PODLight still didn't break.

Kitt continues to look for ways to better the PODLight and increase its usefulness in a number of applications, including the arena of hurricane preparedness. "We're not shy about upgrading the product," he said.

Enthusiasm for his work keeps Kitt going. "If you don't have a passion for it," he said, "it's pointless."

Learn more about the PODLight by visiting [www.lujanusa.com](http://www.lujanusa.com), emailing to [podlight@lujanusa.com](mailto:podlight@lujanusa.com) or call 888-576-4737. Purchase online at [www.the-podlight.com](http://www.the-podlight.com).



Pete Kitt with his PODlight

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**FAMILY MATTERS**

**Growing Up Towing**

*Many youngsters get hooked before they can legally tow*

By Carol Hanna Branch

Rick Bays built a tow truck as a teen — and he was hooked. The business grew like his family. The company has 14 employees with five heavy-duty operators. And Bays and his wife, Linda, have six daughters and one son, Rocky. "Rocky is a mini-version of our dad," said daughter Meghan, who runs the office.

When Rocky Bays was growing up, he'd put on his boots and head out the door with his dad. Still wearing his pajamas, he didn't want to miss the action — even in the middle of the night.

A while back, Rick Bays pulled up to an accident site and told Rocky, then six or seven years old, to sit tight. Not long after that, his dad spotted Rocky standing next to some state troopers holding a flashlight and directing

traffic. "He was always a nosey kid — he had to see what's going on," said Bays, 54, owner of Speed of Light Towing in Watsonville, CA.

**Junior At Work**

The Bays father-and-son duo are not unique. Sam Brewer, president of the 900-member Towing and Recovery Association of America, estimates that more than 85 percent of the towing companies are family-owned. "There are a lot of second- and third-generation towers all over the country," said Brewer, who is based in Orlando, FL.

He's seen the youngsters first-hand at the Professional Wreckers of Florida tow shows in Orlando. "We had over 300 children at an Easter egg hunt here," he said. "Mama and daddy can't go to Disney World and leave the children at home."

Towing dads often carry sons to work, too. Children growing up in the towing business can revel in real-life experiences that set them on a career course early. Trucks, cranes, cars, big rigs — oh my!

Life can be filled with adventure for young towers-to-be. And that means tales to tell — in Rocky's case, a very early one. When Rocky was a toddler, his dad took him on a job. The pajama-clad boy fell asleep in the truck with the doors locked. Dad had to break into his own truck!

**Starting Early**

Rocky, now 21, has been riding around with his dad since he was in diapers. "It's in my blood," he said. Rocky Bays got certified in light duty at age nine and heavy duty at 10. At 16, he took out the International 4700 hook truck for the first time. "I did the standard stuff — tire changes, local tows and lockouts," he said,



Jerry Sr., Jerry Jr., Bryan (on step), and Justin Ondrick

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## GROWING UP TOWING

continued from page 19



**Bud and Harry Rodgers**

The father sees towing work as a good fit for his son. "He's always been a guy interested in doing things he could touch and see the results," Rick Bays said. "He's practical – hands-on. I think he'd go nuts sitting in an office all day."

But the heir apparent started at the bottom, washing trucks, picking up trash. "Everybody has to struggle a little and work hard," his dad said. "You can't lay on the couch and eat bonbons." And seven grandchildren means there could be more staffers forthcoming in the Speed of Light pipeline.

Seeing the results of drinking and driving has made a deep impression on Rocky. "He understands the gravity. He's seen cars with body parts, smashed up and bloody," said his father. But Rocky's able to handle the gore and tragedy. "It's not being callous," he said. "We have to focus on the job."

And that can mean saving lives. Last December during a rare snow storm, Rocky found a woman sitting in her car, facing in the wrong direction on Highway 1. "She didn't want to get out of her car, but I got her into my truck," he recalled. "Then a car smashed into hers. I think that would have killed her."

### Watching & Learning

Jerry Ondrick, Jr, 28, shadowed his dad, too. "I just liked hanging around Dad. I was amazed by what the trucks could do," said the son of Jerry Ondrick, Sr., owner of Gemini Towing in South Plainfield, N.J.

"I grew up in it. I didn't know what else to do," said Jerry, now a dad to Justin and Bryan, another generation learning the towing ropes by watching their dad.

Jerry Jr. remembers the moment he got hooked on towing. A man had had a heart attack on the interstate, crossed the median, and gone under a tractor trailer. The little guy stayed in the truck with his eyes wide open.

"It was amazing how the police, fire department, and my dad worked together. It shocked me," Jerry Jr. recalled. "Those people needed my dad out there to get the car out. And I've watched a lot of wrecks between then and now, but I still think about this one."

### Community Service

Harry Rodgers, 14, not only learns the towing business from his father, Bud,

but he sees good deeds in action. Bud's Towing and Recovery in Cortland, Ohio takes civic responsibility to heart.

The company's crew sets up mock disasters before high school proms to scare drivers into staying sober. They parade through town, take pledges for Relay for Life, and contribute to the Make-A-Wish Foundation.

Bud's Towing and Recovery began back in 1979 when Bud Rodgers, then 21, operated one truck. Now Rodgers has three locations in northeast Ohio, eight operators, and nine trucks, all staying busy.

Young Harry was bitten by the towing bug as a five-year-old when he started pulling a trailer behind a lawnmower in the backyard. Now he watches his dad help neighbors on farms — some stretching more than 1500 acres — recover combines stuck in the fields.

"Right now Harry helps us fix and clean the trucks," said his dad who's been in the towing business for 28 years. "It's good to see someone younger in the business. There are too many older guys."

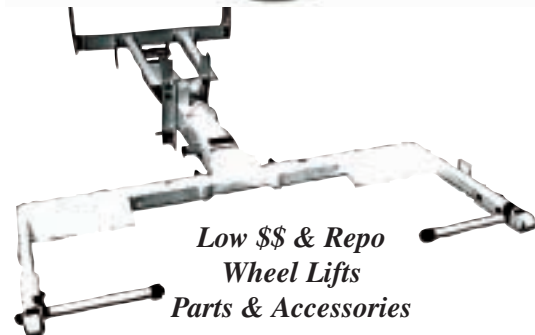
See GROWING UP, page 21

## How To Raise Tow Kids

- Spend lots of time with them both on the job and off.
- Let them go with you but stay in the truck until the scene is secured.
- Always have them wear boots because of the broken glass, gas, and oil on the roads.
- Get them training early even though they can't legally drive; they can still get certified to operate various sized trucks.
- Get them involved with you in helping the community through fund-raising and awareness-raising causes.
- Find jobs around the business that they can do, like washing the trucks and sweeping up glass.
- Remember that they are like sponges – they absorb everything, both the good, bad, and the ugly.
- Keep a positive balance. Mix youth sports and school activities with the towing work.

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**GROWING UP**  
continued from page 20

**Harry's Hero**

While Harry Rodgers likes to play soccer, he prefers towing to kicking. He got certified as an agricultural operator after passing a course at Ohio State University.

A few years ago the son went with his dad to an accident scene involving 72 cars. It took five hours and many tow trucks to clear the wreckage. He watched the Life Flight helicopter carry out the injured and even saw an EMT sew up an arm by the side of the road.

That scene left an indelible mark on the young man. Now he wants to attend Youngstown State University to prepare to teach safety courses for wrecker drivers. "It's interesting that I know all this stuff and my friends don't," Harry said. "I enjoy it and you got to do something you love."

Like his dad does. "During the winter he only gets two hours of sleep," said his son. "My dad is my hero." ❄

**The Laugh List**

**The Wife From Hell**

A police officer pulls over a speeding car. The officer says, "I clocked you at 80 miles per hour, sir."

The driver says, "Gosh, officer, I had it on cruise control at 60 mph. Perhaps your radar gun needs calibrating."

Not looking up from her knitting, his wife says, "Now don't be silly, dear. You know this car doesn't have cruise control."

As the officer writes out the ticket, the driver looks over at his wife and growls, "Will you please keep your mouth shut for once?"

The wife smiles demurely and says, "You should be thankful your radar detector went off when it did."

As the officer makes out the second ticket for the illegal radar detector, the man glowers at his wife and says through clenched teeth, "Dammit, woman, will you shut up and let me handle this?!"

The officer frowns and says, "And I notice that you're not wearing your seat belt, sir. That's an automatic \$75 fine."

The driver says, "Yeah, well, you see, officer, I had it on but took it off when you pulled me over so that I could get my license out of my back pocket."

The wife says, "Now, dear, you know very well that you didn't have your seat belt on. You never wear your seat belt when you drive."

As the police officer is writing out the third ticket, the driver turns to his wife and yells, "Will you please shut up!"

The officer looks over at the woman and asks, "Does your husband always talk to you this way, ma'am?"

"Only when he's been drinking."

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## TOW DOC

# Dang, That Hurt!

*Handling minor injuries when you're out on a call*

By Dr. Teresa Moore

**I** imagine that you have just helped safely rescue a trapped motorist from under an overturned load. While running on adrenaline, you focused only on the task at hand. Now that you have loaded the vehicle, you realize that blood is dripping down your arm.

In the heat of the moment, you were oblivious to your own injuries. Your bloodstained shirt brings you back to reality, and you have to figure out whether your injuries are severe enough to seek medical attention, or whether you can just clean them up and slap on a bandage.

While you most likely won't be in such a dramatic situation very often, the job of a tow truck driver poses the risk of injury on a daily basis. Have you ever wondered which superficial injuries you can safely treat and which ones require further evaluation?

Small nicks, abrasions, and bruises are common occurrences while recovering vehicles. Thank goodness, most of them are minor and do not require any special treatment. Some injuries are more severe and require medical treatment to minimize problems down the road.

Here are some descriptions of common skin and soft tissue injuries, basic first aid tips, as well as signs and symptoms that definitely require medical evaluation.

### Abrasions

An abrasion is an injury in which the uppermost layers of skin are scraped off. Wriggling across pavement, dirt, and gravel to secure vehicles may cause them. In general, the deeper and dirtier the abrasion is, the more likely it is to get infected.

As soon as possible after it occurs, wash the area with soap and water. Remove any dirt that you can see. If you see embedded gravel or dirt that you cannot remove with gentle scrubbing, then you should seek further medical treatment to clean the wound and determine whether a prescription antibiotic is needed.

After cleaning the wound, apply an antibacterial ointment or cream and

cover the wound with a sterile bandage. If you have not had a tetanus booster shot in 10 years (or five years for a really dirty wound), you should see your medical professional to get one.

During healing, it is normal to get a small amount of yellow-green material covering the abrasion. However, if the wound has a funny odor or has pus leaking from it, you need to see a doctor. Keep the area clean and dry except for daily bathing. Change the bandage at least once a day and more often if it gets dirty. Apply more antibiotic salve each time you change the dressing. Once a scab has formed, you can stop applying the topical antibiotic although you should still keep it as clean as possible until the scab falls off.



Zee Medical Kit: A good thing to have in your truck

Even with proper treatment, a wound may still become infected. This usually occurs during the two to three days following an injury. If you develop a fever, more than one-half inch of redness around the wound, an area of redness around the wound that is enlarging over time, or streaking from the wound towards the center of the body, seek immediate medical attention as you may have developed a serious wound infection.

### Lacerations

Even veteran recovery experts run the risk of lacerations or cuts when

maneuvering around broken windows and jagged pieces of metal. Despite taking the necessary safety precautions, you may get cut at times. The initial treatment of lacerations is the same as for abrasions. Clean with soap and water. Then apply antibiotic ointment or cream and a sterile bandage.

If the wound gapes in the middle, appears deep, or won't stop bleeding, it probably needs stitches. If a foreign body is protruding from the wound, leave it in place and seek immediate medical treatment. Mild bleeding can be controlled with direct pressure and topical application of ice.

If it is bleeding profusely, apply pressure directly over the site while someone drives you to get medical attention. It is not safe to drive yourself while applying pressure to a wound.

Make sure you get a tetanus shot as previously described. The signs of an infected laceration are the same as for an infected abrasion and usually occur within two to three days as well.

### Bruises

Even more common than abrasions and lacerations are bruises. Falling on unfamiliar terrain, slipping on rain-slicked pavement, as well as bumping into things all cause bruising. If the area is painful, ice and direct pressure over the area will decrease the pain.

In severe cases, you can develop a hematoma, a collection of blood under the skin, which will be absorbed back into your body over time. Rarely, a hematoma is very painful and requires surgical removal of the blood.

The pain associated with skin and soft tissue injuries is usually relieved with over-the-counter analgesics such as ibuprofen and acetaminophen, which should only be taken according to package directions after reading the product labeling. Ice applied directly to the injured site also helps reduce the associated pain and swelling.

In order to protect the injured area and prevent freezing of the skin, put a towel between the skin and the ice pack.

In summary, most superficial skin and soft tissue injuries are nuisances like paper cuts. Preventing injuries is preferable to treating them. Wearing protective clothing and following safety procedures will keep injuries to a minimum. When you

do get injured, basic first aid techniques may help speed your recovery. Always remember, if you are not sure how to treat your injuries, it is best to err on the side of safety and seek medical attention.

*Teresa Moore, M.D. is a family practitioner and newspaper columnist. She is often invited to present workshops, keynotes, and lectures for civic and educational organizations. Dr. Moore received her B.S. in biology with a minor in genetics from N.C. State University and her M.D. from Bowman Gray School of Medicine of Wake Forest University*

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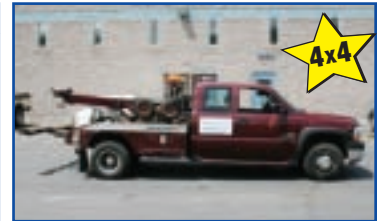
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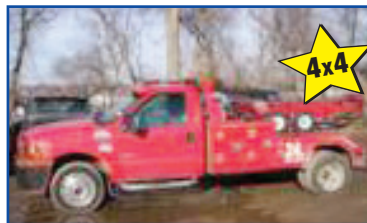
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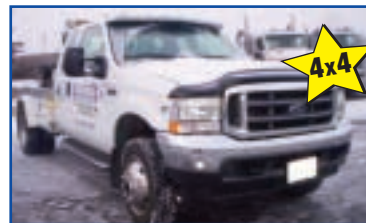
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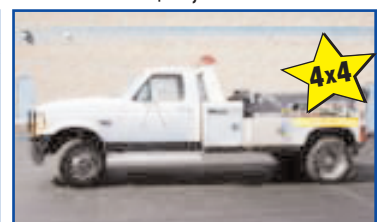
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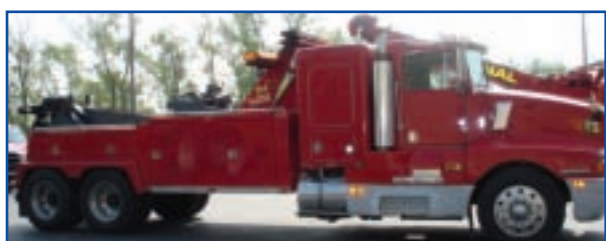
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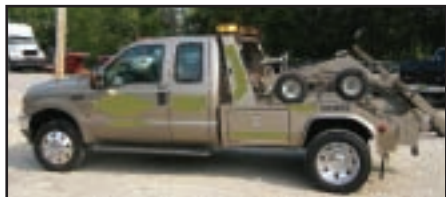
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