



A tribute to the American trucker

Wanting something completely unique when customizing their truck, Holly and Mark O'Donnell created a masterpiece honoring truckers across the nation.

By Tyson Fisher, staff writer

Check out that old-school Peterbilt 379 over there. Wait a second. That's a newer 579.

Anyone who has seen Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association members Holly and Mark O'Donnell's 2018 Peterbilt 579 called "The Family Tree" may have thought their eyes were playing tricks on them. That was by design.

As onlookers get closer, The Family Tree has more surprises.

The Family Tree

It was not very long ago when the O'Donnells were thinking about how to customize their 2018 Peterbilt 579. The husband-and-wife team wanted something special but original.

"Everybody does patriotic, military and EMS," Holly said. "Nobody does 'thank you' to the American truck driver."

And that is exactly what the O'Donnells did while still giving a hat tip to all the patriots.

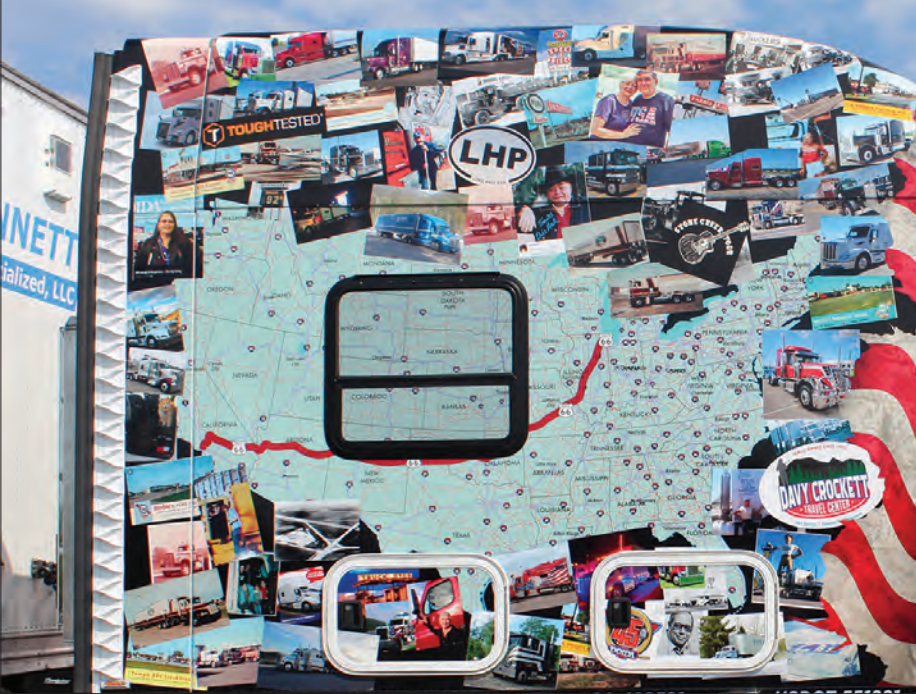
From a distance, the truck takes on two shapes when



Mark (left) and Holly (right) O'Donnell showing off their truck The Family Tree at the Great American Trucking Show in Dallas, Texas. (Photo courtesy of the O'Donnells)

looking at it from the front. When the hood is down, you see a 579 with an American flag. But when the hood is up, your eyes will see the front of an older 379. That's because the O'Donnells put an image of a 379 grille on top of the hood to give off that illusion.

American flags on trucks are relatively common, but perhaps this particular flag looks familiar. Johnny Cash's



“It’s the old coming through the new saying, ‘We’re not quitting, we’re still here.’”

– Mark O’Donnell

only the nation’s interstates with one highway highlighted in bold red: Route 66. The O’Donnells wanted to give tribute to the main throughway before the interstate system was established, thus representing old-school trucking.

At the back of the truck are the words “American Truckin’.” The “g” is intentionally left off “trucking,” and not for visual or verbal effect. Rather, the missing “g” represents the idea that trucking is always going to continue, i.e., there will always be trucks out on the road.

Meet the O’Donnells

The story of Holly and Mark O’Donnell is just as compelling as the truck they operate. Between the two of them, they have nearly half a century of trucking experience.

Mark has 23 years of trucking experience under his belt. Holly has 22 years. The two have been team drivers for five years and were married three years ago. The two didn’t find trucking together. Instead, trucking found them.

Before they met, Mark and Holly were company drivers for different companies. Mark’s now ex-wife was the safety director for the company Holly drove for at the time. While she was out on the road, Holly’s boys were at home with her parents. Eventually, that proved to be too much and Holly considered quitting trucking to attend to her children.

However, Mark’s ex-wife wouldn’t hear it. She offered to rent out a room for her 15-year-old son during the week, separating the boys and reducing the stress and drama at home. Holly would be home every weekend anyway. Holly accepted, and that’s how she met Mark.

There was one problem: Mark was married. Holly honored that and just set that attraction aside. In a 21st century twist, one day Holly noticed that Mark’s relationship status had changed from “single” to “it’s complicated” to “divorced.”

“Once he was divorced, guess what?” Holly said. “It was free game.”

Holly invited Mark over for a barbecue gathering, which he accepted. As the night progressed, Mark eventually realized that no one else was coming over. They have been together ever since.

Look out for Holly, Mark and their two Pomeranian dogs – Miska and Nugget – at next year’s Mid-America Trucking Show, Great American Trucking Show and Guilty By Association Truck Show. **LL**



The Family Tree is adorned with dozens of trucking-related pictures surrounding a map of the United States’ highways, including Route 66 highlighted in red. (Photo by Tyson Fisher)

Holly O’Donnell inside The Family Tree with her canine copilots, Miska and Nugget. (Photo courtesy of the O’Donnells)

album “Ragged Old Flag” was the inspiration behind The Family Tree’s flag. The 379 grill appears ripping through the Cash-inspired flag as if it is coming through the front of the truck.

“It’s the old coming through the new saying ‘We’re not quitting, we’re still here,’” Mark said.

As you walk around the truck, you start to notice that “old and new” theme. Dozens of pictures surround a map of the United States (more on that), representing all generations of the trucking industry, including trucks, truck stops, drivers, OOIDA logo, etc. The O’Donnells described the images as a collage of the old and new.

The passenger side of the truck features newer images, mostly trucks and drivers. On the other side, you’ll find more black-and-white pictures of truckers, trucks and truck stops that are long gone today. The O’Donnells spent at least a month searching for the perfect images that represent the trucking industry. They spent additional time getting permission for copyrighted images. Eventually, the couple obtained more than enough photos, with enough left over for two more trucks.

All of these images surround a map of the nation on both sides of the truck. This is not just any map. This map features