

For several years, SC&RA has benefitted from the energy, perseverance and thoughtfulness of its new president David Lowry.

Terry White reports

At the

divisions: Flatbed, Stepdeck, Government Services, Heavy Haul and Air & Space Services. Specializing in hauling heavy, oversized and unusual freight, BME has transported some of the largest pieces of equipment ever moved on the open road.

Although Lowry has become recognized over the past 30 years as one of the industry's most respected innovators, a twist of fate likely kept his career path from taking an entirely different direction. The story began in 1974, when his mother, Marcia Taylor, and stepfather, J.D. Garrison, purchased George Bennett Motor Express, a small carrier in McDonough, GA with 15 trucks and 30 trailers.

Having worked for another specialized transportation company, they bought the enterprise as a way to gain operating authority in what was then a heavily-regulated industry. They quickly started to build on the two initial contracts—Sunshine Biscuits in Columbus, GA and Ford tractor parts in Memphis, TN. By the time the Motor Carrier Act of 1980 was put into place to largely deregulate the industry, the company had already begun to expand, operating more than 30 trucks.

Family ties

After Garrison died in 1981, David Lowry's mother called and asked him to help run the company. He felt particularly obligated to quit his job on a dairy farm in southern Illinois and move to Georgia because others in his family were unable to pitch in at the time. His brother, Danny, was serving in the Marines and his sister, Lynette, was in college.

"When my mother took the helm, there were very few, if any, women running trucking companies," recalls Lowry. "She didn't even know what she was going to do or how she was going to do it. She said she was going to turn the company over to God for a year and see how it went."

But Taylor turned out to be a strong manager with good instincts and the full, loyal support of agents, owner-operators, shippers and, ultimately, banks. Indeed, she has since earned numerous accolades, including being named Georgia Female Entrepreneur of the Year by *Venture*



New SC&RA President David Lowry is active in a number of organizations, but he says "SC&RA is second to none. They're overworked, but they still take the time to address members' personal concerns. They know their business, and they know our business."

magazine, #1 Woman Owned Business by *Atlanta Business Chronicle*, #2 Diversity Owned Business in Georgia by *DiversityBusiness.com* and the #5 Woman Owned Business in the United States by *Women's Enterprise Magazine*.

"She has been very conservative and methodical in growing the company," says Lowry. "And she has always put us in a position to take advantage of opportunities that present themselves to us."

To illustrate her management style, he recalls the company's entry into multi-axle trailers: "I was intrigued by the idea of buying a nine-axle trailer. Geoff Fischer at Trail King showed us how it would work, and it was pretty impressive. She said, 'If you can keep it busy, you can buy it.' I couldn't stomach the price and didn't buy it."

He remembered that basic guideline as he began purchasing additional equipment that he knew the company could keep busy. Eventually, that inventory included nine-axle extendables.

In the late 1980s, Lowry personally designed a special piece of equipment to haul vehicles out of Louisville, KY. "When we first had them on the road, I was the

David Lowry thinks quickly. Perhaps more than any other quality that has helped him build Bennett Motor Express (BME) into an international leader in the specialized transportation industry. And his ability to think on his feet as president of BME should serve the entire industry well as president of SC&RA. He assumed the gavel during the closing ceremonies at the SC&RA Annual Conference, April 12-16 in San Diego, CA.

Based in McDonough, GA, BME ranks high in the 2011 *ACT Transport 50*, coming in at third in fleet size (1,528), fourth in total capacity (40,220 US tons) and sixth in employees (520). BME is the largest of seven companies within Bennett International Group. Altogether, the Bennett International team boasts more than 3,000 contractors, agents and employees.

Lowry's tale of how he introduced BME to the heavy haul business is as enlightening as it is entertaining: "I made a sales call on Jetway in Ogden, Utah. They'd asked me how many double-drop extendables we had. Instead of saying, 'What's that?' I asked 'How many do you need?' To get the job, we ended up buying a double-drop extendable from Trail King in South Dakota, deadheaded to Utah, picked up the load, and hauled it to Detroit."

Unfortunately, the brand new trailer's maiden journey ended with its theft in Michigan.

"That trailer cost \$35,000. It was the most expensive trailer we'd ever bought, and we never saw it again," says Lowry. "But it did a really good job, and we liked the business. So we placed an order for more. Pretty soon we were running about 15 of them and carved out a niche for ourselves in that segment of the industry."

Adding those double-drop extendables contributed to a strategic BME strength – versatility. Today, BME includes five

helm



only one who could work them,” he says. Since then, he has introduced a number of other trailer configurations into the industry.

He quickly became aware of plenty of instances where companies had vehicles but lacked drivers qualified to handle specialized loads. That led directly to the beginning of the company’s driveaway services, which has become one of the company’s largest operating divisions, offering more than 1,200 bonded, Department of Transportation certified owner/operators.

Similarly, Lowry started Bennett International Transport (BIT) after hauling heavy cargo to ports for a company that was unhappy with the handling of the shipment after it headed to foreign countries. “I figured if I can haul it to the port, why can’t I handle it overseas?” he says. “I didn’t know anything about it, but I hired some guys who did.”

Today, BIT has 47 offices and agencies worldwide. The company combines every aspect of global transportation into a specialized freight forwarding operation designed to meet virtually any door-to-door need, whether rail, air or ocean freight.

Committed volunteer

Although David Lowry was the first to join his mother in building the family business, they have since been joined on the Board

of Directors by his younger siblings Danny Lowry and Lynette Alt. Danny is in charge of multiple companies within the organization. The most significant of these is Bennett Truck Transport, which has become a leading transporter of factory built housing, commercial buildings and recreational vehicles. He also is responsible for Bennett Distribution Services, which offers a wide range of value-added services through warehousing, supply chain management, yard management, and state-of-the-art Web based technology.

In addition to being in charge of Bennett’s marketing program, his sister also is the owner of ALternative Logistics, a small logistics company. Although it operates outside of the Bennett group, the other family members offer her plenty of emotional support.

For years, SC&RA has benefitted from the energy, perseverance and thoughtfulness that David Lowry has brought to his family’s business.

“When we decided to join the association, we probably weren’t all that sure what benefit it was to us,” he recalls. “We really didn’t take advantage as much as we should have of everything it offers.”

Besides selling him equipment, Trail King’s Geoff Fischer also sold him on the value of participating in the association.

“I was at an SC&RA meeting in Cincinnati, and he somehow talked me into coming onto one of the committees,” he says. “Since that first committee, I’ve served on just about every committee I could.”

In SC&RA’s 2010-2011 Committee Directory, he is listed on the Board of Directors (as SC&RA Vice President), Executive Committee, Transportation Group Nominating Committee and the Truck Permit Policy Committee. He also is very active in the SC&R Foundation, which funds industry related research and scholarships for students interested in careers in the industry, serving on its Board of Directors and Development/Public Relations Committee (Chair).

Several years ago, as Chair of the SC&RA Transportation Group Governing Committee, he took every conceivable opportunity to good-naturedly coax members into purchasing raffle tickets

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DAVID LOWRY, SC&RA president

to benefit the SC&R Foundation. He cleverly worked fundraising appeals into sessions he moderated at the Specialized Transportation Symposium and the Annual Conference. His company even donated transportation services so that a large food smoker donated by WHECO could be prominently displayed at the meetings. That raffle raised well over \$20,000 for the Foundation.

Nobody sold as many tickets as David Lowry. Nor did anybody buy more tickets. Indeed, when the winning ticket was drawn, one of his many numbers was called.

“The SC&R Foundation is one of the most beneficial – and enjoyable – parts of the association,” he says. “Our company feels that it’s important to invest in the community, and the Foundation has a similar type of outlook. The scholarships and grants are such a great way to help somebody interested in coming into the industry, and those named scholarships let companies make tax-deductible contributions, while at the same time, honoring someone that’s important to their organization.”

Lowry also praises the Foundation for funding research on significant issues such as safety improvement and oversize/overweight permit uniformity. His service on the Truck Permit Policy Committee

has made the latter issue particularly significant for him.

“When you work on these issues for so many years, you realize how many challenges we face,” he says. “Sometimes, you win the battles, but you never win the war. As Doug Ball likes to say, ‘We’re always trying to push that rope uphill.’”

For him, Ball, SC&RA’s vice president, transportation, exemplifies the high caliber of the SC&RA staff.

“I’m active in a number of organizations, and SC&RA is second to none,” he says. “They’re overworked, but they still take the time to address members’ personal concerns. They know their business, and they know our business.”

Lowry sees the challenges facing both SC&RA staff and members as becoming increasingly complex.

“Trucking is supposedly a deregulated industry, but really we have more regulations than ever, and there are more coming all the time,” he says.

Of particular concern to him is the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration’s new Compliance, Safety, Accountability (CSA) program and changes to the Hours-of-Service

regulations.

“CSA is more important than a lot of people realize. Training about CSA is the most important tool right now for drivers, salespeople, and shippers, along with people in the government who implemented the regulations and those who enforce it,” he says. “While we’re trying to figure it out, attorneys are out there trying to figure out how to use it against us as an industry. The companies that can embrace the challenges and stay ahead of the curve are going to be the ones that survive.”

Challenges ahead

He notes that the crane and rigging side of the industry must deal with the same challenges as they transport their equipment on the nation’s roadways while encountering specific regulatory issues on the jobsite such as conformance to the new, comprehensive federal Cranes and Derricks safety standard.

“It’s unbelievable what we’re all facing right now,” he says. “That’s why it’s important to attend SC&RA meetings and keep updated on all these issues as much as you can. I always say the crane

guys should attend the transportation meetings, and the transportation guys should attend the crane meetings. They’re all interrelated.”

Moreover, he encourages members to be active participants at the meetings.

“Express yourself. Share your concerns. Know that somebody is listening,” he says. “Even if sometimes you feel like you just can’t get anywhere, you need to realize that, at the end of the day, our association has made a large impact in dealing with regulations and laws.”

He says he is convinced that whether a company is a Transportation Group member that hauls cumbersome loads, a Crane & Rigging Group member that lifts them into place or an Allied Industries Group member that produces the equipment or services that contribute to the successful completion of the job, “We all want to be the safest part of the industry, even though we have the highest exposure, and we can make a big difference by working together.”

Clearly, anyone wanting a role model on how to make an impact in the industry through SC&RA participation would do well to start by looking at David Lowry. ■