

# OWNER OPERATOR ORIENTED BENNETT MOTOR EXPRESS

OFFERS INDEPENDENCE WITH SECURITY

BY ROXANE CAMPBELL

Owner operator Jerry Peugh had just gotten back to Georgia from a long run, and dispatch had asked him if he would take a load to Detroit. He was tired, and more than ready for a break, but he just couldn't make up his mind whether to take it because Bennett Motor Express, the company he was leased to, was always so good to him and anyway, he was a relatively new employee at the time. He was reading a magazine, and trying to decide what to do, when a woman walked into the break room and asked him what was wrong.

"I explained to her my situation," Peugh said. "She looked at me sympathetically, and said, 'You're tired. You go on home, you need a break. They'll understand.' So I did."

It was several months later before Peugh realized who had so kindly encouraged him to go on home. She was, and still is, owner and president of Bennett Motor Express, Inc., Marcia Garrison.

**A**s Jerry Peugh told this story over the telephone, he was sitting in Mrs. Garrison's office and in her chair.

"That's just the kind of people they are around here," Peugh said. "They treat you like human beings. It's never 'I'm the boss, you're the peon,' around here. I'm at home here at Bennett as long as they'll have me, or as long as I can work.

"Don't get me wrong, though, life is no bed of roses, and we all have our problems—day-to-day stuff," Peugh continued. "But there's always someone here that will listen. For example, you might have mechanical problems, and these things happen. But if

you communicate, it'll be worked out here. And it's usually in my behalf."

Jerry Allen, another owner operator for Bennett, agreed.

"I know everyone around here, and if there's a problem, I can talk to anyone about it," Allen said. "They have true open door management—no appointments. And there are never any hard feelings, 'cause it's like a big family around here. They hear what you have to say, and they don't get mad when you complain."

Barbara Phillips, vice president of safety for Bennett, explained the philosophy behind providing this atmosphere of open communication for drivers.



*"You do at your own discretion at Bennett," said Jerry Peugh, an owner operator leased to Bennett Motor Express. "It's like being 100 percent individual with the security of a company to back you up."*

"If we didn't have owner operators and drivers, we wouldn't have a company," she said. "Since they're such a major part of the company, we *need* their comments, suggestions and ideas. If they have a good one, we'll implement it, because *they* make the money for us."

And they do make money.

"They have rates as good as anybody—and better than lot of companies," said Larry Shanks, a Bennett owner operator from Lexington, Ky. "I'd say they have very good, very competitive freight rates."

"Bennett pays well," Peugh concurred. "I'm making a good living."

Allen, from Easley, S.C., stated the same.

"It's a good opportunity for a man who really wants to work," he said. "The main thing at Bennett is the money is good."

Allen knows what he's talking about, because it's been more than once that he looked to other companies for better opportunities. But it's Bennett Motor Express that he always comes back to.

"I've tried other companies—you know, things always look better on the other side," explained Allen, who started with Bennett in the '70s. "But it's just not so when you get there. I've never found another company as good as Bennett. And it's been like coming home when I come home to Bennett. I'm not

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## BENNETT MOTOR EXPRESS (cont.)

just not a number there—they even recognize my voice when I call in."

The friendliness and personalities of the people at Bennett convinced Peugh as well to lease on. He had been pulling heavy haul for six and a half years, and was unhappy. He had seen a lot of Bennett trucks, the company was close to his Rockmart, Ga., home and he liked the loads (heavy freight) Bennett hauled.

"I just stopped in one day and talked to them. Everyone was so nice, and so honest," he emphasized. "They didn't try to solicit me, or tell me they were the best company. So I figured, at least it's a nice bunch of people—and that's got to amount to something." Another factor that persuaded Peugh to talk to Bennett was word of mouth.

"Most every contractor I talked to about Bennett had something good to say," he said. "And you see them running together, helping each other out and they stay together at truck stops. If you hear a contractor complaining about Bennett, I can guarantee you one of two things: either they haven't been there a year yet, or they're the type that can't get along with anyone. If you're that type, you don't need to be there anyway. And either of those types will quit after a year or so." Allen, also drawn to look into Bennett because of word of mouth, said he had heard "darn good things about them."

Another important part of the Bennett package is the non-forced dispatch system.

"You do mostly what you want to do," said Allen, who owns a 1986 White GMC and drives for the van and flatbed division. "There's no pressure to take loads—no forced dispatch."

Peugh, whose personal experience with Mrs. Garrison backs that up, emphatically agreed.

"Bennett does *not* have forced dispatch," he said. "They tell you what they have, and you pick your load. It's first-in, first-out.

"You do at your own discretion at Bennett," Peugh continued. "It's like being 100 percent individual, with the security of a company to back you up. That's why, when they get in a bind (to satisfy a customer), you'll take a load. You may not want it, but if they ask, you'll take it. You don't turn the company down when they're in need, because they always stand by you."

Shanks, who was encouraged to lease on to Bennett by a friend who helped open the company's Nashville, Tenn., terminal agreed.

*"It's the woman that owns the company that impresses me," said Larry Shanks, a Bennett owner operator from Lexington, Ky. "Marcia is very much involved with the business—she's not just sitting back taking in the money, she's out there moving it forward."*

"One of the main things I like about Bennett is you're able to do what you want to do," he said. "You run the territory you want to run, and pick the traffic lanes you want to run in.

"But it's the woman that owns the company that impresses me," Shanks added. "Marcia is very much involved with the business—she's not just sitting back taking in the money, she's out there moving it forward. You're liable to run into her anywhere. She's the biggest asset to the company."

The driver and equipment requirements to lease on at Bennett are strict; as Mrs. Phillips put it, "We're picky about who we hire." However, this results in a quality fleet of equipment and a superb register of drivers, making it quite worthwhile to become a part of the "Bennett Bunch." If you meet the company's requirements, you'll reap the rewards that Allen, Peugh and Shanks have—personal, financial and otherwise.

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# Owner Operators

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## BENNETT MOTOR EXPRESS (cont.)

Safe driving awards and bonuses, based on no accidents, are awarded annually. Bennett drivers can receive an extra 3/4 of a cent per mile for driving safely. Service awards for longevity are also given in conjunction with safe driving.

Quarterly regional drivers' meetings are held with corporate officials around the country, based on the knowledge that it's not easy for drivers to all gather in one place, so officials go to them. At these meetings, drivers are given insights on the direction Bennett is heading, and drivers' advice and suggestions are welcome.

The home office and all the regional offices hold Driver Appreciation Week annually, usually the first week in June. Although this year, due to the Dallas and Atlanta truck shows, it will be the second week.

"We dedicate a whole week to make a point of saying 'thank you' to our drivers, who get a button that says 'My company

appreciates me,'" Mrs. Phillips said. "The regional offices have sandwiches, hot dogs, steaks and a fish fry, and people bring food to the home office. We go all out, and you can pig out all you want. And other companies' drivers are welcome."

With the way Bennett's owner operators feel about their company, maybe there should be an appreciation week for all the others at Bennett.

"I'll be here 'til I die or retire one," said Allen. "It's just like home to me."

"It's been good at Bennett, I have no complaints," Shanks said. "They listen to you when you talk. They're good people, sincere people. And you don't find that much today."

"It's a great bunch of people willing to work together," Peugh said. "It's a great place to be, and it pays the bill. It's plain as that in a nutshell—I'm happy here." □

*Bennett Motor Express, which has always been led by driver-oriented people, was started some 30 years ago as George Bennett Truck Lines by George Bennett. When he decided he was tired of sitting in an office and wanted to go back to driving a truck, he sold the business to J.D. Garrison, who had been a driver since he was 16 and who already owned several trucks.*

*Garrison, originally from Illinois, moved the company to its present location in McDonough, Ga., and began to increase the fleet of trucks to meet the demands of the ever-increasing list of shippers. Garrison, who Mrs. Phillips described as, "not just your boss, but one of your best friends," enjoyed continued growth and prosperity until his death in May 1981. The company was turned over to his wife, Marcia, who has a background in trucking and had served as secretary/treasurer of Bennett.*

*Since Mrs. Garrison took over, the company has quadrupled in size through an increased fleet and scope of operations and diversification into other areas of transportation.*

*Mrs. Garrison, who is not reluctant to tread*

*on new territories of transportation services, has not only expanded on the mainstay operations of the van, flatbed and dropdeck freight divisions, but has opened the doors to include drive-a-way/truck-a-way, LTL, auto transport and expedited services.*

*As a result of her foresight and success in the transportation industry, Mrs. Garrison was named Venture Magazine's 1988 Entrepreneur of the Year. This distinguished honor is awarded to someone in the business world who displays true leadership through the continuing success of the company he or she owns.*

*"When you've got somebody at the top with the attitude Marcia has, it filters down throughout the company," said Larry Shanks, a Bennett owner operator. "She gives good leadership and good management."*

*Mrs. Garrison said that while she was the recipient of the award, the real success story of Bennett lies with the dedicated owner operators, drivers, agents, regional managers and corporate office staff.*

*"I certainly didn't do it alone," she said modestly. "Everyone works together here."*

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