

Transport Topics

TRUCKING'S FRONTLINE HEROES

2020



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Honoring Trucking's Frontline Heroes

*When the pandemic hit,
the men and women of
the trucking industry
rose to the occasion*

By Seth Clevenger

Managing Editor, Features

Turbulent times have a way of revealing the heroes among us. With the historic COVID-19 pandemic exacting a horrific death toll and inflicting severe economic pain in the United States and around the world, seemingly ordinary people have stepped up to serve on the front lines of the fight against this virus.

These everyday heroes don't wear capes, but you can find them tending to patients in a hospital, stocking shelves at a grocery store, or behind the wheel of a commercial truck delivering essential goods.

Professional truck drivers and other workers in the transportation industry have always performed indispensable jobs, but many have gone above and beyond the call of duty during this pandemic to ensure that store shelves remain stocked with necessities and crucial medical supplies arrive on time.

This special commemorative publication, Trucking's Frontline Heroes, sets out to capture the stories of these workers who have made personal sacrifices and risked exposure to the virus to help fuel the nation's response

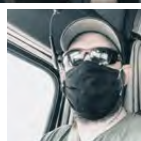
to the COVID-19 outbreak.

The men and women of the trucking industry have stepped up in so many ways during these challenging times.

They headed into COVID-19 hot spots to deliver ventilators and other medical equipment to hospitals.

They distributed cleaning products and personal protective equipment across the country as cases began to spike.

They ensured that food and other necessities remained available to consumers across the country, even when many businesses and





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restaurants had to temporarily close their doors.

They delivered packages to people's front doors so they could stay at home rather than risk additional trips to the store.

They took extra steps to sanitize trucking equipment and logistics facilities to help prevent the spread of the virus.

They made personal sacrifices, in many cases working longer hours and forgoing vacation and home time to haul relief loads.

Through it all, this pandemic has served as a powerful reminder of just how much we all rely on truck drivers to keep goods flowing, even in normal times.

Many thousands of professionals throughout the trucking industry have been doing their part, from drivers to warehouse workers, as well as dispatchers and back-office staff, fleet managers and the technicians who maintain and repair the trucks.

While it's impossible to honor each of them individually in a publication such as this, TRANSPORT TOPICS has decided to highlight six unique heroes who exemplify the trucking industry's dedication to keeping our society moving forward during these challenging times.

To find these stories, TT asked its readers to nominate industry professionals who exhibited uncommon dedication and selflessness in the face of this pandemic.

After receiving scores of nominations, a panel of TT editors selected a handful of them for this special recognition. From there, TT's reporters interviewed these heroes and their colleagues to learn more about their experiences and the unique ways they contributed to their companies, their customers and our country.

And now, during National Truck Driver Appreciation Week, TRANSPORT TOPICS is proud to present Trucking's Frontline Heroes. [TFH](#)

Heroes on the Web



Be sure to check out expanded coverage of Trucking's Frontline Heroes on the Web, including video interviews, stories and a photo gallery featuring the men and women who are keeping essential freight flowing during the coronavirus pandemic.

Go to ttn.ws/heroes





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Meet Trucking's Frontline Heroes

6 Peter Lacoste, NFI Industries

With the country in the grip of the pandemic, Lacoste took on the responsibility of sanitizing truck cabs to help keep his fellow drivers safe from the virus.

12 Susan Dawson, Brenny Specialized

To ensure that essential freight continued to reach its destination, Dawson headed into New York City when it was the epicenter of the outbreak.

18 James Rogers, Spartan Direct

When COVID-19 shut down much of the economy, Rogers jumped into action to deliver relief supplies and covered for a colleague who fell ill during the pandemic.

26 Cesar Quintana Moreno, Hub Group

As demand spiked for certain consumer goods, Moreno stepped up to train new drivers hired to ensure that shelves remained stocked.

30 Kevin Cooper, Centerline Drivers

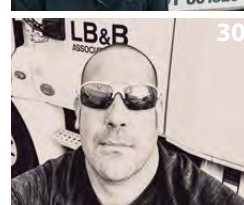
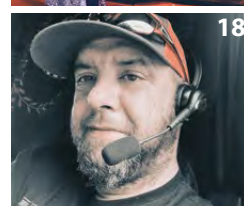
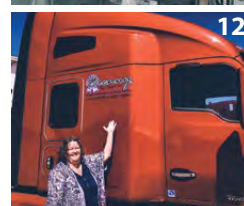
At a time when personal protective equipment was scarce, Kevin Cooper began making face masks to help protect fellow drivers and other frontline workers.

34 Reggie Barrows, FedEx Express

While raising donations for a local food bank, Barrows also ensured that residents received their packages on time as they stayed home to fight the pandemic.

38 More Industry Heroes

People throughout the trucking industry have done their part in the fight against COVID-19. Get to know several other industry professionals who stepped up when it mattered most.





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Lacoste's Workdays Start With a Clean Slate

By Judd Hanson
News Editor

Keep it real, keep it clean, keep it real clean.

Words to live by during a pandemic, to be sure. But for Peter Lacoste, they represent more than a catchphrase. They are his crusade.

Lacoste, 55, is a 17-year NFI Transportation employee based at the fleet's Framingham, Mass., location, and a 30-year trucking veteran.

A driver-trainer who works with recruits brought along through NFI's program, his job involves coordinating operations within the yard, communicating with drivers and ensuring deliveries stay on track.

But when the COVID-19 outbreak began to take hold, Lacoste took on a new responsibility — sanitizing the company's trucks to help keep his colleagues safe.

On March 17, Massachusetts began ordering many businesses to shut down in an attempt to curb the spread of the coronavirus, but NFI Transportation, as an essential business, remained open and continued to transport vital goods. The division of Camden, N.J.-based NFI Industries delivers truckloads of 5-gallon jugs of

Poland Spring water for one of its primary customers, Nestlé Inc. NFI Industries ranks No. 18 on the TRANSPORT TOPICS Top 100 list of the largest for-hire carriers in North America.

NFI Transportation uses slipseating in routes that stretch from Maine to Pennsylvania, meaning that multiple drivers share the same truck. Constant cleaning is imperative.

"It's real important that what we do is keep coming to work," Lacoste said. "If one person, say, gets sick, it will spread like wildfire."

To that end, doing his part to ensure the safety of the terminal's 83 drivers and six-member office staff became the primary focus.

That means a deep clean for about 40 trucks, depending on the driver rotation. Lacoste's wife, Novi-

lyn, and her mother, Norma, helped by securing supplies.

Novilyn is used to seeing such dedication.

"He always volunteers ... even on vacation," she said. "He'll always answer the phone. He's very dedicated to his job."

The first order of business is removing the big debris, such as food bags, snack wrappers and soda cans. That's followed by blasts from a



Peter Lacoste



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leaf blower to get surface grit out. Then the sanitizing, with alcohol, Clorox, or basically whatever is available.

"The focus is always on the interior ... what people touched for the past 14 hours," Lacoste said, referring to the time of a driver's shift.

It takes about 45 minutes to get a truck ready for the next driver. "Once you get a system, it starts moving a little quicker," he said.

Nothing can be left to chance.

"Every switch, button, dial. If you forget something, you think, 'Is that the thing [that could transmit the virus]?'"

As the outbreak worsened, drivers' apprehension increased. The first step was to put their minds at ease.

"It started by making the drivers comfortable coming into work, and getting into a truck someone else just got out of," said Tom Cosgrove, logistics supervisor for NFI Transportation.

The destination also could be a cause for trepidation, said Mike Kelly, an NFI transportation manager.

"One of the biggest challenges we had was

Lacoste has been diligently sanitizing truck cabs to help keep his colleagues safe from the virus. *NFI*



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convincing a driver to get into a truck and drive four hours to New York City,” he said, referring to the nation’s largest concentration of COVID-19 cases during the initial months of the pandemic.

As of mid-July, not one NFI Transportation worker at the Framingham drop yard — driver or office personnel — has tested positive for the disease.

Not that there hasn’t been a close call. At one point, Lacoste, Cosgrove, Kelly and two other company employees had to be tested after coming into contact with a customer’s employee who was infected.

Lacoste will be married to Novilyn for 19 years come October and is the father of three daughters: Tara, 30, and 18-year-old twins Nicole and Samantha.

He sees his co-workers at the Framingham yard as an extension of his family.

“The biggest thing is, I care about our guys,” said Lacoste, who lives in Worcester, about an 8-mile commute from the Framingham drop yard.

“He takes the new-hire training to heart,” Kelly said, “and is passionate about getting the safety message out to new drivers. Particularly sleep patterns, and the proper ways to back a [tractor-trailer] unit into a door/dock.”

In September 2019, Lacoste was honored for 1 million safe miles with the company.

Navigating a public health crisis isn’t all that has tested Lacoste’s resolve. Nature can wreak havoc, too.

He remembers driving Route 287 in New Jersey in the aftermath of Superstorm Sandy in the fall of 2012 and coming upon a swath of road that had washed away. Authorities directed him off the road, and he got the truck turned around.

From that experience, he learned that sharing information on road conditions can be crucial.

“What we deliver is water. You got to make your delivery,” Lacoste said. “I contacted other drivers and asked, ‘What did you try?’”

Cosgrove said Lacoste’s troubleshooting and problem-solving abilities were on display a few years ago when a blizzard dropped 3 feet of wet snow as the weekend approached.

“Peter and I met at the drop yard to see how bad the damage was,” he said. “Some of our trucks had been completely plowed in with massive 6-foot snowdrifts; others were just surrounded completely.”

The big dig began that night, but just 10 trucks were cleared over eight hours. As the weekend progressed, the remaining 30 trucks were freed, thanks to more equipment and two more volunteers.

“Dedication is what sets Pete apart from the rest — know what needs to be done, and make



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Top Left: Lacoste, a 17-year NFI employee, inspects a trailer at the company's Framingham, Mass., location.

Top Right: Lacoste is among a group of NFI employees tasked with keeping the company's equipment clean and its staff COVID-19 free.

Left: Lacoste wears a protective mask as part of his work attire during the coronavirus pandemic.

Photos courtesy of NFI



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it happen," Cosgrove said. "The gift he gives NFI is incredible, and I can't imagine the last 13 years I have been here without him."

Lacoste said that aside from the camaraderie, he identifies with the corporate culture.

"What I enjoy most about NFI is that it's a company that's aggressive as far as the personnel part goes," he said. "I really enjoy the way NFI empowers everyone. It's been quite progressive lately."

Lacoste, who has worked exclusively out of the drop yard for the past three years, said he enjoys helping his colleagues and "coming in, doing the job, and going home."

Being home each night has many benefits, but because of the pandemic, not all joyous occasions are guaranteed. Nicole and Samantha graduated high school this spring, but the commencement ceremony was canceled.

"It's a moment in your life you can't experience," he said.

Outside of work, Lacoste enjoys bicycling and camping. When he retires, Lacoste and his wife plan on moving to her native Philippines, where they have built a house. [TFH](#)

**Lacoste and his wife, Novilyn,
enjoying a meal in the Philippines.**

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When Country Paused, Dawson Delivered

By Eleanor Lamb
Staff Reporter

In March, when the coronavirus pandemic transformed bustling metropolitan areas into deserted ghost towns as people hunkered down in apprehension, Susan Dawson recognized an opportunity to serve.

Dawson, 57, drives for Brenny Specialized Inc., a trucking company based in St. Joseph, Minn., some 75 miles northwest of Minneapolis. Over the past several months, Dawson has been hauling a combination of sanitation supplies that have been in high demand during the pandemic and regular freight that she would ordinarily move during her over-the-road dispatches.

She has gone all over, crisscrossing from Washington to Boston to Florida. Dawson has delivered hand sanitizer to Houston and, when she spoke to *TRANSPORT TOPICS* during a stop in Dallas, she was carrying a load of fire extinguisher ingredients bound for Allentown, Pa.

During the height of the outbreak in the Northeast, Dawson delivered water in New Jersey and picked up a load of batteries in New York City the following day. She spent the night in her truck, which she parked behind a building in New Jersey, remaining cautious and safe in what was then the epicenter of the pandemic.

"I never really ran into any danger, but I can tell you, my eyeballs were the size of 50-cent pieces," Dawson said. "It was an eerie feeling, needless to say. It kind of reminded me I wouldn't want to be the last person on Earth."

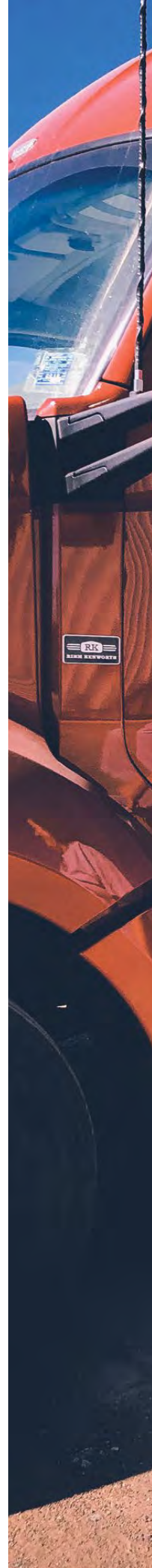
As an over-the-road truck driver, home time is precious for Dawson, who lives in Indianapolis, which is 660 miles from her company's headquarters but close to her siblings, nephews and cousins. When the pandemic started to rapidly sweep the country in late March, Dawson decided to forgo the home time she had previously booked so she could continue trucking.

"We were extremely busy when all this started. However, we wouldn't have denied her home time," said Joyce Brenny, founder and CEO of Brenny Transportation and Brenny Specialized Inc. "We were very, very leery of how we were going to get that load out [to New York City] with everything going on. She said 'I can take it.' She does not let fear be her ruler."

Brenny said the average driver at her company logs 8,000 to 10,000 miles a month. In May, Dawson covered 13,000 miles.

Dawson said her decision to skip her home time and continue working was rooted in a sense of duty and teamwork.

"I was not abandoning ship," Dawson said. "I just wanted to keep doing what everybody else





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was doing. My country needed all of us drivers out here and the way things happened so very fast, it was actually scary."

Dawson ultimately made it home for a few days in June. She doesn't plan to return again until the holidays, although she may "sneak in around September."

Growing up three blocks away from the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, Dawson developed a love of vehicles at an early age. The whirl of the race cars was her soundtrack and, when she was old enough, she worked at the track, selling newspapers, hot dogs, ice and beer.

Through one means or another, Dawson has always moved freight. She started her career loading and unloading airplanes. This work led her to the moving industry, where she packed up belongings from people's houses, loaded them into trucks and delivered them. She eventually earned her commercial driver license and became an owner-operator. After about 15 years in the moving industry, Dawson transitioned to hauling refrigerated freight.

Although Dawson has been with Brenny

Dawson helped keep freight moving in New York City when it was the epicenter of the outbreak. Brenny Specialized



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Dawson has been running extra miles to deliver essential freight during the pandemic. *Brenny Specialized*

Transportation for just over a year, she's been driving for 32 years. Dawson said she has worked for a few different companies, but none of them quite clicked with her the way Brenny has. When Dawson first met Brenny Transportation representatives at the Mid-America Trucking Show, neither she nor the Brenny team expected to form a connection. Dawson was there to talk to people and pick up some new pens and pencils. Brenny and her colleagues were there to display an old truck. Dawson said God led her to them. Brenny said the universe aligned.

"I have never, ever in my life met a company such as Brenny Specialized out of St. Joseph, Minn.," Dawson said. "These people are about their work. They're solid. It's all in capital letters for me for these people."

Driving cross-country has allowed Dawson to see new places and try all sorts of cuisine, from lasagna in New York City to cod in Washington, clam chowder in Boston to shrimp scampi in the Florida Keys. During the pandemic, Dawson said she's been able to shop at Walmart to keep her in-cab refrigerator stocked.

Some drivers refuse to make runs to certain places that are hard to maneuver in, such as New York City. Some won't cross the Mississippi River. Dawson isn't picky about where she's sent.

"They'll say, 'Where do you want to go?' and



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I'll say, 'Shuffle the deck,'" Dawson said. "Whatever comes out of it is where I go. You've got to be flexible for these companies. It's a new adventure."

Outside of trucking, Dawson enjoys swimming, outdoor activities and playing her guitar. She said the bathroom is the best place for strumming Beatles tunes because the acoustics are particularly good. When she's home, she takes advantage of the opportunity to go to the store for ingredients and experiments with different recipes.

Sarah Wischnefski, public relations director at Brenny Transportation, said Dawson's "servant heart" extends beyond hauling freight. It was Wischnefski who nominated Dawson for recognition as a Trucking Frontline Hero. She said Dawson has supported organizations such as Truckers Against Trafficking and charities such as the St. Christopher Truckers Relief Fund, a charity that helps injured truckers and their families.

"She's always looking to help serve wherever it needs to be done," Wischnefski said. "She's very selfless. She puts everybody else's needs in front of her own, which in turn on the road keeps everybody else out there extremely safe."

Dawson said she tries to translate her Christian values into her interactions with friends and strangers. Oftentimes, that attitude is reflected in how she treats other drivers. She said she recently met

a driver who was stuck with a messy trailer; movers had left pads, straps and decking bars strewn from "front to tail" inside the trailer. Dawson helped her fold the pads, wrap up the straps and re-deck the bars, a process that took over an hour.

*"My country needed all of
us drivers out here..."*

Susan Dawson

Recently, Dawson said she's been encouraged to see a return to the "old school of trucking" among her fellow drivers. She said people are looking out for each other more, helping one another back their trailers into docks.

"Lately, it seems like everybody's picking up the pace and getting back on board with being the old-school truck driver," Dawson said. "Oddly enough, I think it has something to do with the coronavirus and the world shutting down. I think it put some kind of light in some people. We don't see anybody anywhere, so let's start getting back with truck drivers here and helping one another out." TFH



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Rogers Continues to Serve As Veteran Turned Trucker

By Eleanor Lamb
Staff Reporter

On the Fourth of July weekend, when neighbors were figuring out how to stage their own fireworks displays and people cautiously gathered for backyard barbecues, truck driver James Rogers returned home for the first time in three months.

Rogers, 43, owns Spartan Direct, a small trucking company based in Pevely, Mo., about 30 miles south of St. Louis. When the coronavirus pandemic struck, Rogers and his team of three drivers immediately began hauling emergency relief supplies, such as hand sanitizer and personal protective equipment, to help support the nation's response to the outbreak.

They've primarily transported loads of Procter & Gamble Co. goods from the company's Edwardsville, Ill., facility to places such as Salt Lake City and Seattle.

At the height of the pandemic, Rogers said they'd run all the way to Salt Lake City and deadhead back to the St. Louis area to pick up another load of emergency supplies before driving west again.

As the owner of a small fleet, Rogers deals with challenges associated with both trucking and small business ownership.

He said hauling relief loads has been key to his company's survival over the past several months, and expressed gratitude for the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration's emergency declaration that offered a temporary exemption from certain hours-of-service regulations for carriers involved in coronavirus-related relief efforts.

"It hasn't been easy," Rogers said. "We were on the brink. It was a teeter-totter. When the pandemic happened, honestly, if it wasn't for relief loads, we'd probably be out of business."

When restaurants and rest areas shut down, Rogers and his teammates stockpiled their trucks with food and invested in camping toilets.

If food was running thin and Rogers knew he'd be traveling near his home in Pevely, he'd arrange to meet his wife Jennifer somewhere for a contactless grocery hand-off.

Unfortunately, Rogers' team did not go unscathed while delivering essential goods.

In late May, Spartan Direct contract driver Kevin Lewis came down with symptoms of the coronavirus, which he described as "the cold from hell."

When he learned of his colleague's health, Rogers met Lewis at a truck stop outside Cheyenne, Wyo., picked up his trailer, delivered his





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load for him and brought the trailer back.

Lewis returned to his home in Springfield, Mo., where he and his wife Melissa, who herself was already feeling sick, quarantined in their apartment for more than two weeks.

Lewis doesn't know where he caught the virus; his best guess is he was infected while passing through a travel center. While he and Melissa were recuperating, he said Rogers would call to check on them. They've both since recovered.

"I honestly feel that his No. 1 concern is us as his contractors," Lewis said, speaking to TRANSPORT TOPICS from Hutchinson, Kan., where he was picking up a load of sodium product bound for a feed and seed facility. "He's just an upright dude. You can't find a better person."

Rogers knows what it is to face hardships and spend long stretches of time away from home. He served in the U.S. Army for 11 years, stationed in Afghanistan with a platoon he described as a "jack-of-all-trades" crew that conducted missions for security, route clearance and resupply.

Rogers has guided his small business through the pandemic while hauling relief loads. *Courtesy of Shannon Currier*



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Prior to joining the Army at 27, the enlistment age of “an old man,” Rogers drove trucks, a skill which he was able to utilize during his military service behind the wheel of Humvees and armored vehicles.

*“I needed to serve
something bigger than me.
And that ‘bigger than me’
is the country [and] the
people.”*

James Rogers

During the platoon’s response to an attack on its forward operating base, Rogers sustained a severe back injury as he helped a fellow soldier mount a machine gun on a vehicle. A rocket-propelled grenade struck the opposite side of the vehicle, blowing Rogers away and causing him to land hard on the base of his neck.

When he woke up in the aid station, he didn’t know he had broken his back, and neither did his physicians. He only knew he didn’t want to leave his team. It took a couple of years and a return to the United States for a doctor to identify his broken back, which, at that point, hadn’t healed properly.

Rogers knew something was physically wrong; he could no longer run, he relied on a cane and he experienced bodily shakes. The Army ultimately discharged him for medical reasons.

Rogers’ return to civilian life was rocky. Dependent on strong pain medication, he’d exhaust a 90-day prescription in a month. He’d carry around a grocery bag full of prescriptions, ranging from Percocet and Vicodin to Oxy-Contin and a fentanyl patch. He hit rock bottom on the day that Jennifer discovered him in the bathroom with a pistol. He credits her with rescuing him from the brink of disaster, at which point he decided to make a positive change and re-enter the trucking industry.

“I was a statistic,” Rogers said. “I was that veteran you always hear about having a hard time transitioning. When I did realize that I needed to make a change in my life, it was the realization that I did want to get back into driving. The part that got me back into driving was I needed



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to fill a void. I needed to serve something bigger than me. And that 'bigger than me' is the country [and] the people."

Rogers moves pretty well these days, although he still deals with post-traumatic stress disorder and anxiety. He's mastered strengthening exercises to help with pain management and inflammation. He's been sober for about three and a half years.

The idea to create his own trucking company came in 2017, at which point Rogers was driving for Prime Inc. He was awarded a truck and authority as an owner-operator in the spring of 2018 through the Keys to Progress program, a partnership between Progressive Insurance and the St. Christopher Truckers Relief Fund, a charity that helps injured truckers and their families.

Shannon Currier, director of philanthropy and development for the St. Christopher Truckers Relief Fund, first met Rogers on paper in November 2017, when she was reviewing applications for the Keys to Progress program. It was Currier who nominated Rogers for recognition

Rogers came to the aid of a colleague who fell ill during the pandemic.

Courtesy of Shannon Currier

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At TrueNorth, we Go Beyond the Policy because you go beyond for us everyday. If we settled for “good enough”, our team wouldn’t have sent out over 15,000 hand sanitizers to drivers across the nation during the height of the Covid-19 outbreak. We wouldn’t have worked diligently to equip our clients with the latest resources and expert advice for navigating these uncertain times. We go beyond because it’s the least we could do to say thank you for all you do everyday to keep this country moving forward.

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as a Trucking Frontline Hero.

Currier and Rogers developed a rapport through phone interviews over a series of months before meeting in person in March 2018 at the Mid-America Trucking Show.

*"[I think] being as prepared
as possible is what has
helped him stay successful
through all of this."*

Shannon Currier

"He's one of those people that you meet and you're like, 'Have I known you my whole life?'" Currier said. "He just wanted to do his job and he was positive about it. You really have to have a good business sense and be prepared for emergency situations, and goodness, who could've prepared for something like this? Nobody. But [I think] being as prepared as possible is what has helped him stay successful

through all of this."

Rogers hauls all sorts of goods, ranging from hay bound for a therapeutic riding farm in Wilmington, N.C., to masks and gowns destined for Indianapolis.

When he speaks to TT, he's in Madison, Ala., delivering a load of groceries.

Rogers is willing to drive anywhere for a load, but he particularly enjoys the Midwest and Northeast, noting that a lot of his family is from upstate New York.

His dream load would take him from Maine to Seattle, allowing him to cruise across North Dakota, Montana and northern Idaho on his way.

"Every time I drive down the road, I look out the window and, being a combat veteran and seeing death, destruction and third-world countries, I get to further appreciate why I did it. I further appreciate why I served," Rogers said. "I know people get aggravated with trucks. But, it's that satisfaction that if that's the worst thing that you're worried about, and you have no idea what's going on in the rest of the world, then somewhere along the line either myself or a fellow veteran has done something right."

Rogers goes long stretches without seeing his family, but he's never alone. His service dog,

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Rogers' service dog, Sergeant, is his constant companion on the road.

Courtesy of Shannon Currier

a stout American Staffordshire terrier named Sergeant, is his constant companion.

Sergeant, who turns three this Thanksgiving, goes with Rogers everywhere. If Rogers steps out of the cab, Sergeant watches him using the truck's mirrors. He senses and responds to Rogers' needs, laying on his chest if he has a nightmare or supporting him if his ankles give out.

When he's not driving, Rogers enjoys fishing, hunting and spending time with his family, which, in addition to Jennifer and Sergeant, includes three kids and a grandson.

At the time he spoke to TT, he said he plans on going home in early August and spending about a month off, but he acknowledged that he'll probably "keep bugging" his Congressional representatives to secure some relief for independent truckers such as himself.

Rogers noted that a lot of small carriers are still perched on that financial teeter-totter that he encountered during the early days of the pandemic.

"I would like to consider myself fortunate," Rogers said. "There are a lot of people that are floundering. We put a lot of that work in. In a time when we answered the call of the country, now everybody's kind of in a position of, 'When are they going to answer our calls?'" TFH

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Moreno Stepped Up To Keep Shelves Stocked

By Eugene Mulero
Senior Reporter

Cesar Quintana Moreno, a professional truck driver with Hub Group, might not think of himself as a hero, but that's increasingly how many people view him and other truckers who have delivered essential goods during the coronavirus pandemic.

In the midst of this public health crisis, frontline workers in the freight transportation industry have hauled groceries to supermarkets, medical supplies to hospitals and other staple goods to businesses and residences.

"It doesn't get delivered by envelope," Moreno said of essential freight during a recent conversation with TRANSPORT TOPICS.

During the early days of the pandemic, the importance of freight transportation was made all too clear when some consumer goods became scarce due to panic buying as the outbreak immobilized nearly every aspect of society.

"The thing that got everybody to calm down again [is] when they started seeing the shelves being stocked up again. They're like, 'OK, it's coming back to normal.' So that's one less thing that they had to worry about," said the 41-year-old Moreno, a Southern California native who is

married and has three children.

The trucking life, he emphasized, is a vocation.

What began as a job assisting with moving boxes and loading trucks inspired a passion for driving the truck itself.

He has been a commercial driver for more than a decade now, including six years at Hub Group, a provider of intermodal transportation, trucking and logistics services. The Oak Brook, Ill.-based company ranks No. 12 on the TRANSPORT TOPICS Top 100 list of the largest for-hire carriers in North America.

Moreno's primary task is delivering supplies from Southern California to Home Depot locations in Las Vegas and San Diego.

"They have all types of freight in there: power tools, cleaning supplies, toilet paper. So, they're very essential, right there," he said.

Through it all, he has appreciated the support and recognition he has received from members of the public, particularly when arriving at a store with long lines of customers waiting to get their supplies.

"They see me coming up, and sometimes they wave at you and everything," Moreno said. "It's a good feeling, you know, that they won't have to be going to another store or driving around all day long looking for their essential needs. It's a good feeling for the driver, just to see that he





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helped out for the day.”

After several years, the delivery routes have become familiar. He has several favorite dining and coffee establishments that he refers to as trucker-friendly.

And, like most people, Moreno has made adjustments to adhere to safety guidelines such as social distancing to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

When embarking on his routes, he is prepared with masks and personal protective equipment, or PPE. The objective, he said, is to keep it safe and healthy.

Meanwhile, Moreno also stepped up to assist with training new drivers hired by Hub Group to quickly fill roles prompted by the health crisis.

Several of his colleagues said Moreno ensured these new employees received proper training amid the stress and strain of the pandemic.

“Cesar epitomizes the term: professional driver,” Krystal Zamacona, a site manager at Hub Group, told TT. “He has been with the company for over

Moreno ensured that new drivers received proper training amid the strain of the pandemic. Hub Group



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five years and during this time he has become a huge asset to the team, both driving and training. He not only strives to be a great driver but pushes those around him to thrive, also. Dedicated to safety, being ambitious are just a few things that describe Cesar."

The new safety training will remain important long after the pandemic runs its course.

"We're just praying for each other, making sure we're safe, because after the pandemic there's still all the driving that you have. There will be another day on the road," Moreno said.

Given the growing recognition of trucking's essential role in our society, Moreno hopes the motoring public will take a step back and be more understanding of the men and women whose job it is to deliver the nation's freight.

"We are moving the essential needs right now. We haven't stopped. We thought we were going to get shut down too, but, I guess not because how are we going to survive without the food, the medication, the toilet paper, tools, whatever you need," he said. "Have a little bit more patience with us because we are slow moving vehicles, wide turning vehicles — all those things."

When asked if he considers himself a hero, Moreno admitted he doesn't view his work through that lens. "I never thought of that,

you know — myself being a hero. Just that my daughter wears a shirt that [says] 'My Dad Is a Hero.' And I see that, it's like the greatest feeling you get. But — I don't know — that's something that caught me off guard right there. Being a hero? I don't think of myself as a hero."

*"[Cesar] not only strives
to be a great driver but
pushes those around him
to thrive, also."*

Krystal Zamacona

Rather, Moreno insisted he is simply out there making deliveries and helping his colleagues do the work that is helping the nation make it through the pandemic. "We just consider it a job for us right now, but when you look back at the end of the day, get off your truck and you turn it off and you look at it again, and it's like, 'Wow, we did this today,' he said. "We moved freight for people that needed it." ^{TFH}

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55 ACCIDENT-FREE YEARS DRIVING OVER-THE-ROAD

Bill Kerry of American Bulk Commodities, Inc. is a true trucking professional, and his **55 years of accident-free** driving is only scratching the surface. Bill continues to lend an open ear and mentorship guidance to newer drivers, helping them learn the finer details of operating a truck safely, from company policies and mechanical details to the latest in safety features. DMC recognized Bill as our **2020 Driver of the Year**, and we are proud to thank all the great drivers like Bill for their continued resilience throughout this pandemic.

"The trucking industry serves as the vital lifeline between producers and consumers. Drivers like Bill are the unsung heroes of our nation's effort to combat the coronavirus. Today, our customers make me very, very proud to be a part of their industry."

Joe DeVito, CEO of DMC Insurance



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Cooper Fights Coronavirus By Making Face Masks

By Connor D. Wolf

Staff Reporter

Professional truck driver Kevin Cooper found a unique way to help fellow drivers and other frontline workers in the early days of the coronavirus pandemic.

At a time when many were struggling to find personal protective equipment, he and his wife, Kimberly, took matters into their own hands by making protective face masks and handing them out for free to people who needed them.

"We didn't ask for any donations," Cooper told TRANSPORT TOPICS. "We didn't ask for any of the costs back. We just did what God says we're supposed to do and helped others. That's what you're supposed to do, especially in a time like this when you have two options. You can become selfish and be in it for yourself or you can jump in and help people. We're all in this together fighting this virus."

Cooper, 45, was born and raised in Santa Rosa, Calif.

He has worked as a driver in various jobs since obtaining his commercial driver's license in 2006.

Cooper eventually settled into his current role at driver staffing firm Centerline Drivers,

which brought him in as part of its mobile team in June 2018.

Since then, the company has sent him on numerous assignments with his wife by his side. They often stay in hotels, but when he is not on a work assignment they reside in Columbia, S.C.

*"We're all in this together
fighting this virus."*

Kevin Cooper

Centerline Drivers has 36 local branches nationwide with headquarters in Santa Ana, Calif. The company had 3,572 drivers as of 2019.

Cooper is currently driving for Centerline client LB&B Associates, a facilities management and logistics company.

When the pandemic began to take hold in the United States, Cooper and his wife were staying at a hotel while he was on assignment distributing liquor throughout West Virginia.

They noticed the few hotel workers there were



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having trouble getting protective equipment.

"We got here in the middle of March," Cooper said. "There were three people here total for probably about a month and a half. The workers behind the counter did not have protective face masks and neither did we. You couldn't get them anywhere. You couldn't get them online. It was about a three- to five-month wait on Amazon."

But when JoAnn Fabrics craft stores in the area started advertising free, do-it-yourself mask assembly kits, Cooper and his wife decided to step up and help.

"They looked around and saw that people were kind of afraid. People in the area were scared," Centerline Drivers Service Director Sheila Castaneda told TT. "COVID was hitting hard and people didn't even know where it was headed yet at that point. Kevin decided since it was so hard to find masks that he and his wife, Kim, were going to make some masks themselves."

Cooper recalled how they started off with the free mask-making kits. They included fabric,

Cooper learned how to sew protective face masks at a time when they were difficult to obtain. Centerline Drivers





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sewing supplies and pellon filters. He then spent a couple of hundred dollars on more materials to make more masks.

They also watched online tutorials and borrowed a sewing machine from the hotel manager's daughter to get started.

"We brought them home and worked on the free ones they gave us first," Cooper said. "We handed them to the front desk staff first. Then we brought them down to my contractor, which is LB&B. They distribute liquor through the whole state of West Virginia."

The Coopers started by making 23 masks over the first nine days starting March 20. Then colleagues at LB&B helped them distribute the masks to the other drivers and warehouse workers.

"At that point two things happened," Cooper said. "Number one is we couldn't get the pellon material anymore. JoAnn Fabrics was wiped out. People were starting to catch on and they were making masks at their houses themselves, which is a great thing. We couldn't order them online, so we got to 37 and had to stop. The second thing

Cooper and his wife, Kimberly, made face masks and provided them to other frontline workers. Centerline Drivers



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that happened was all of a sudden even 7-Eleven was selling masks.”

Cooper concluded his mask-making experience after it became clear that people were now able to get them for themselves. But he recalls how happy and relieved he made people when that wasn’t the case.

He attributes his helpful nature to the lessons instilled in him from his mother while growing up.

“I always find myself trying to help somebody,” Cooper said. “The thing my mom taught me was if you walk by a piece of trash pick it up and throw it away even if it’s not yours.”

Cooper added that by the end, they had been making masks for about 14 days. The 37 masks they assembled included six designed specifically for children that they figured out how to make upon request.

The good deed has resonated with Cooper’s industry colleagues.

“Our customer is extremely appreciative,” Castaneda said. “They think very highly of him. I can’t speak personally about people in the neighborhood but I can say that the drivers, and our customer, are extremely appreciative. It’s just so heartwarming that a driver would step up and do this in our country’s time of need.” ^{TFH}



Protective face masks were hard to find in March, so Cooper and his wife started making them. Centerline Drivers



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Barrows Brings Packages, Lifts Community's Spirits

By Eric Miller
Senior Reporter

Heroes don't always wear the beige coats and pants of firefighters, the blue uniforms of law enforcement or the pastel scrubs of medical workers.

Sometimes they wear purple and orange and sit behind the wheel of a commercial vehicle.

FedEx Express courier Reggie Barrows, 62, is a man who went beyond the call of duty during the COVID-19 pandemic. Not only did he work night and day delivering packages to residents in the small town of Falmouth, Mass., he also helped drum up interest in a donation drive for the local food pantry.

During the difficult early days of the pandemic, Barrows and local photographer Lee Geishecker did their best to ease some of the pain and boredom for their fellow residents stuck at home. For more than two months, nonessential businesses pretty much stayed closed in the town of 31,000 near Cape Cod, Geishecker said.

It was Geishecker, owner of VagabondView Photography, who created a local version of the national "Front Steps Project," an effort to lift area residents out of the virus doldrums by taking family photos on front porches. It was Barrows who gave it a voice.

There was no charge for the photos. Instead,

all that was asked of the families was a donation to the Falmouth Service Center.

Geishecker said from the beginning, she called on Barrows for assistance.

"Reggie happens to be one of the most recognized faces, along with his FedEx truck, in our little town of Falmouth," she said. "Everybody knows Reggie."

Geishecker said Barrows was in an essential business from day one of the public health emergency. So, while many were staying in, his local notoriety gave him a megaphone to help drum up support for the photography project. In a six-week time frame, Geishecker said she photographed more than 245 families using socially distanced photo sessions. The photo sessions generated more than \$30,000 in donations for the food pantry, a local institution that also gives away clothes and helps local residents find jobs.

As Geishecker snapped photos, Barrows spread the word, and people wanted to jump on the bandwagon, she said.

Barrows said he was intrigued when he first noticed Geishecker taking photos of families on their front porches.

"I was wondering what she was doing," Barrows said. Then, his support for the project began with a photo she took of him standing in front of his delivery van. The image was posted on Geishecker's





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Facebook page and went viral.

"Reggie's post with the FedEx truck and his post with his family [photo] were the two biggest hits of the entire 245 families," Geishecker said. "That's what he means to the community. He is an unsung hero to this community. I'm not trying to be corny about this, but he was there with what people needed, when they needed it, and with a smile underneath his mask."

"It's a good cause," Barrows said. "I've never thought of myself as a hero, but it's mind-blowing that people feel that way. I'm happy to help people."

Barrows also has helped out on projects ranging from the annual "Thanksgiving Day Chase the Turkey Race" to participating in a drive for a new library in West Falmouth.

His boss, Joe Zingarelli, operations manager for the FedEx warehouse facility in nearby West Yarmouth, said Barrows has spearheaded an annual walk to raise money for Alzheimer's disease, and has been active in Toys for Tots at Christmas.

"He's a stand-up guy in the community. He's very, very involved in the community," Zingarelli

Barrows helped promote a local food drive while delivering packages.

Lee Geishecker — VagabondView Photography



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said. "His customers call him the mayor of Falmouth. ... On one occasion when I was in the vehicle with him, we're driving through Falmouth. It's amazing. Cars coming in the opposite direction are waving out their windows at him and honking their horns."

Barrows said life in Falmouth changed when the pandemic first hit in March.

"It was creepy," he said. "I love talking to people. But the strangest thing to me was that during this pandemic, people were hiding in their houses, peeking out their windows, and haven't been coming up to the door. Sometimes it made me feel like I was the disease."

Over his 28 years at FedEx, Barrows has seen his share of bad weather, poorly marked streets and houses, not to mention several dog bites.

Then came the pandemic.

"My typical work day has changed," Barrows said. "I became an essential worker. My uniform now includes gloves and a mask. I used to deliver about 75 to 80 packages a day, including pickups. Now I average about 100 per day plus pickups. I feel like it's peak season every day." TFH

Barrows, pictured with his family, has been an "unsung hero" in his town.

Lee Geishecker — VagabondView Photography



Watch

the rest of the story.

Enjoy these stories? Hear them told straight from the heroes themselves.

Now that you have had a chance to meet these frontline heroes, it's time to **watch the rest of the story.**

From adapting to supply shortages and final-mile demands, to instituting new sanitation measures and workplace standards, the challenges that presented themselves in the beginning of the pandemic grew every day.

Transport Topics recognizes these incredibly heroic stories and honors those who humbly rose, and continue to rise, to the occasion. Head to **ttnews.com** today to watch first-hand digital shorts of each hero's experience. While there, explore a special portrait gallery featuring other poignant moments of heroism.

Celebrate the industry's heroes. Scroll, tap, watch, read, replay and share their stories at **ttn.ws/watch**

**TRUCKINGS
FRONTLINE
HEROES**

Heroes in Action

1. Charles “Chad” Pavlosky, 32, a professional driver for Carbon Express, went beyond the call of duty on an oil haul in April, when he was forced to spend two nights sleeping in his daycab truck. The customer, nervous about COVID-19, also had him wear a head-to-toe suit that exposed only his eyes. *Photos courtesy of Charles Pavlosky*

2. Raymond Bradford, 58, of Memphis, is a 30-year safe driver for FedEx Freight who played a key role in FedEx Cares initiatives during the pandemic. He delivered N95 masks, hygiene kits and hand sanitizer as part of the company’s in-kind shipping program. *Photo courtesy of FedEx Corp.*

3. Brad Hougas, 47, a driver for NFI Industries, hauls essential goods from Minooka, Ill., to a grocery store in Cincinnati. He donated a stash of pizzas to the store’s employees, as well as a stack of \$20 gift cards for anyone in need. *Photo courtesy of Melissa Hougas*





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4. Charlton Paul, a 24-year driver for UPS Freight, has stood next to President Trump at the White House, served as an America's Road Team captain and a UPS All-Star, and participated in volunteer efforts for organizations such as United Way. During the pandemic, he delivered 1,000 masks, 200 bottles of hand sanitizer and 4,500 pairs of gloves donated by his company to his hometown of Chester, N.Y. *Photo courtesy of UPS Inc.*

5. Javaris Anderson, 35, of Jacksonville, Fla., has owned Unity Transport Service Inc. since 2012. He owns 16 trucks and employs more than 20 drivers, many of whom he hired in April to add to his Amazon account as online orders picked up at the height of the pandemic. *Photo courtesy of James Crichlow — Atlantic Logistics*

6. Tammie Dimmitt, human resources and benefit administrator at refrigerated carrier Grand Island Express, has earned a nickname from her co-workers: "Positive Polly." She sends messages to each of the company's drivers to let them know there's a care package with disinfectant, snacks, masks and water waiting for them. For the office staff, she's checked temperatures every day for months. *Photo courtesy of Caron Albert — Pixelstix Design, LLC*

See more heroes in our online photo gallery at ttn.ws/heroes



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