

FOR THE TRANSPORTATION PROFESSIONAL

"Elite" FLEET®MAGAZINE

Special Issue

2019 DRIVER OF THE YEAR FINALISTS



- BIG APPLE, BIG TRUCK, NO PROBLEM!
- Livestock Relocation Expert Competes for Driver of the Year

VIEW FROM THE WINDSHIELD



JIM FRANCK
President

One of the best nights of the year. An opportunity to celebrate the Elite of the "Elite Fleet". And please don't take that lightly. Overall we have the best Drivers in the industry. So these Drivers we celebrate are all truly special. You'll get the opportunity to hear their stories, shake their hands and give them our heartfelt gratitude for going above and beyond every day.

Every year it is truly difficult to make a decision as to what Driver will be Driver of the Year. This year was no different. Each one deserves the honor but, unfortunately, there can only be one winner.

2019 was a tough year in the trucking world. Coming off a record setting year in 2018, the freight environment did a complete turn this past year. To say the "bottom fell out" would be an understatement. The only reason we made it through as successfully as we did was because of the dedication and hard work of you – our Drivers. Without you, none of us would be here.

This isn't just the recognition of these 12 special individuals but for every "Elite Fleet" Driver. Whether you deliver livestock, hides, boxed meat, chocolate, frozen foods, or ice cream, doesn't matter.

This night is a celebration of all you do! Our hats off to each of you!







STEVE GLEISNER

Executive Vice President



MIKE RINEHART

Vice President Finance



MARK PHILLIPS

Vice President Refrigerated Operations



KEVIN VROMAN

JANUARY DRIVER OF THE MONTH

"Kevin and I started working together in April of 2017. It became apparent he was a hard worker and adept at working smart. He is astute, aware of where he is and where he is going. He is instinctual in his quick assessment of a variety of situations concerning his current dispatch and preplans. If you have a load that needs someone to run block and tackle on it, Kevin Vroman is your person," shared Jeff Chance, driver manager.

Kevin added, "I began driving OTR after both my wife and I lost our jobs in 1999. I am the man of the house. I was motivated to earn as much money as I could in the least amount of time. I was driven to provide for my wife and three children. I chose trucking and I've never looked back. I have been an owner operator in the past; however, I enjoy driving a company truck. If I have a problem, I call and it is taken care of. I expect to retire from National Carriers."

"I have found many positives working here. First and foremost, I have never been with a company that reacts as quickly as National Carriers when I have a problem. They respond swiftly whether it is equipment breakdown, safety, or dispatch. Finally, they have good freight to keep drivers moving."

STEPHEN DIXON

FEBRUARY DRIVER OF THE MONTH



When asked about Stephen Dixon, assistant director of leasing, Kim Obholz quickly voiced her appreciation.

"I have had the pleasure of working with Stephen for 12 years. He has completed several truck leases with National Carriers. He is currently on his second buy-out, which he will complete in March 2021, if not sooner. What makes him successful? I believe several things: his professionalism, how he presents himself, his customer service with a smile, and his reputation for on time deliveries. He runs the northeastern United States and New York City. He is a very good businessman. I have enjoyed having conversations with him over the years about high school football since we both have kids that played. I feel very fortunate to have him in our lease program," concluded Obholz.

Driver manager, Mike Ritchie grins when asked about

Stephen Dixon.

"My driver I know as Dixon! He's been with NCI since 2008 and has leased numerous trucks. I started working at National Carriers in 2010 and, shortly thereafter, took on the role as a Driver Manager. Dixon has been on my fleet since the beginning. He has always been a New York City runner. and he is very familiar with the surroundings. He knows exactly what it takes to get from either of the beef plants in Kansas to the northeast United States. He has an outstanding service record. Remembering back to the good old days, he was known as "Superman" because he was able to get across the country quicker than any other solo driver. Of course, all that has changed now, but his dedication to National Carriers has remained incredible. Whenever I have a driver that is nervous about going into the boroughs, without hesitation, I'll give them Dixon's phone number. He will guide them directly to the customer they are scheduled to deliver to. Drivers like him are why we are called the "Elite" fleet. I do not see him as just another driver, but a friend."



RYAN WILSON

MARCH DRIVER OF THE MONTH

After three and half years with NCI, Wilson feels he is a part of a larger family. He appreciates that his DM

knows what he wants, including going to New York City where extra compensation is paid to NCI drivers. Originally from Florida,

Ryan now resides in Kentucky.

"Ryan Wilson is a driver that, once you meet him, you will remember him. He is a very giving person who doesn't think of himself first. He is also a New York City runner who will go above and beyond to help anyone stressing out about finding their way around the Big Apple. I recall him staying on the phone with a nervous driver. For over an hour Ryan gave him turn by turn directions in and out of NYC. He has never met a stranger, and he would give you the shirt off his back," expressed his driver manger. Mike Ritchie.

Mike continued, "Ryan takes the majority of his time off in Puerto Rico to relax, take in the sun, and forget about his normal day to day trucking routine. As we all know, Puerto Rico has been devastated with some natural disasters these past few years. Ryan doesn't like to be recognized for his good deeds, but I believe people should know about his kindness. He has personally donated over twenty thousand dollars to purchase numerous generators and other supplies. He wanted to make sure people who are less fortunate would be able to have amenities that we are all blessed to enjoy on a daily basis. I don't just consider Ryan a truck number or a driver, I consider him a friend as do many others."

Kim Obholz, Assistant Director of NCI Truck Leasing, shared, "I have worked with Ryan Wilson for five years. He is currently in his third truck lease. Ryan plans on buying his own truck in the future. What makes him successful? He will go to the northeast states and into New York City. He understands our freight lanes, and the constant changes in our industry. As a true businessman, he is always looking to the future. Personally, I have enjoyed having conversations with him about his family and his love for his mom, something I envy. He is a very kind soul, and is always looking to help someone else, or to pay it forward. I wish him

nothing but success and happiness."

DEBRA THORNTON

APRIL DRIVER OF THE MONTH



After working ten years in a factory, Debra Thornton developed carpal tunnel syndrome, forcing her to seek other employment. She trained to transcribe medical records but found it overly stressful. As she contemplated her future she reflected on her childhood. She had enjoyed watching trucks on the road while her family travelled in their camper. Voicing her displeasure to a friend concerning her medical job, the friend suggested she consider studying to earn a Commercial Driver's License. The rest, as they say, is history.

"After earning my CDL, I began my driving career. I chose to leave the first company I was with because they would no longer allow me to carry both of my small dogs on the truck. They told me to get rid of one. Instead, I got rid of them, and called National Carriers. My recruiter said they would welcome both me and my dogs to the "Elite" Fleet," Debra explained.

Debra grew up with a good work ethic. She feels NCI stands behind their drivers. After starting with NCI, she had unexpected personal issues that needed to be resolved. The company supported her as she worked through her dilemma. She formed a solid relationship with her driver manager, Debra Haley, during this difficult time.

"I just do my job, fly under the radar, and do the best that I can. After the call informing me that I had been selected, I just sat in my driver's seat shocked in disbelief," she recalls.

"Debra Thornton has the experience and motivation that a lot of drivers wish they had. She is always on time, proud of the job she does, and is a very hard worker. I enjoy working with Debra as she is very pleasant and very professional," stated Driver Manager Debra Haley



WAYNE STRATTON

MAY DRIVER OF THE MONTH

"Wayne Stratton joined NCI in August 2016, as a company driver. He lends his expertise by helping to train inexperienced drivers through National Carriers' driver training program. He finds this rewarding, as he shares his insight with new drivers at the "Elite" Fleet. Wayne has trained over a dozen new drivers who he remains in contact with, continuing to coach and encourage them. I've never had a complaint involving him. He is one of the nicest and laid-back guys you will ever meet," exclaimed JD Jackson, Driver Training Manager.

Driver Manager Jeff Chance shared, "On January 24th of this year, Wayne was assigned his sixteenth student to train. He is at the forefront of educating, mentoring and ushering in new students into NCI's culture of safety and service. He is patient, polite and has tons of experience – ideally suited for a Driver-Trainer. Based on our current number of company tractors, and the sixteen students he has trained, Wayne is responsible for 3.2% of our truck drivers and over 1.6 million miles per year.



JASON PRICE

JUNE DRIVER OF THE MONTH



"Jason Price is a good family and businessman. He is always respectful of others, has a kind heart and would do anything to help anyone. He is an ideal leasing partner. I have worked with him for three years. He is currently in his second truck lease. Jason runs the northeastern states and the boroughs of New York City. I see him only a few times a year, but he has a great work ethic and does very well. He is not one to hang out and talk. He is out there to make money and take care of his family. I think of him as a gentle giant with a great smile. In July, he took off the month with his family, but what impressed me most is that he had enough money in savings to cover his weekly leasing expenses. He is a hard worker, a great businessman and a great example for the NCI truck leasing program," said NCI Assistant Leasing Director Kim Obholz.

"Jason Price is a gentle GIANT. Standing at almost seven feet tall he can look very intimidating. Jason is one of the hardest working men I know. He is very dedicated to his family. He goes home once, or if he's lucky, twice a year, providing a great living for his family. I couldn't imagine being 6'8" tall and staying in a truck as long as he does. That takes dedication. Jason knows every load he's ever hauled with NCI, as he keeps notes of each customer he has been to. Understanding what it takes to be a lease operator, he knows what he has to do to be a successful lease driver and to provide for his family," driver manager Mike Ritchie confided.

Ritchie concluded, "Jason has never turned down a load. When we need his help, he has always been there without question. In the beginning he requested to not go to the boroughs of New York City, but after asking him once to cover a load, he was hooked. He has kept requesting them, which is a tremendous help for the company. Jason is a great example of why National Carriers is called the "Elite" Fleet."



RICHARD DIGMAN

JULY DRIVER OF THE MONTH

"Freight in the hide division is always consistent, plus I get home once a week. After my first year with National, I decided to buy a truck, hoping to increase my income. I can do my own mechanical work so that helps keep my expenses down. I even overhauled the engine in my first truck. There have been some growing pains, but I am glad I did it," shared owner operator Richard Digman.

National Carriers Driver Manager Phillip Eade commented, "Richard is willing to go the extra mile to help or give up the extra mile to help someone in need. He is an excellent communicator and very dependable. I enjoy working with him."

"Richard came to National Carriers at the recommendation of a friend. He started as a company driver in the Hide division back in 2016. After about a year of being a company driver, he was in position to buy his own truck, thus becoming one of five owner operators in the division. After fixing nearly everything on his first Kenworth truck, he has moved into a newer Kenworth and is doing great," Phil continued.

"Richard Digman is not a pushy kind of guy. He doesn't call me at 6:55 in the morning because he is ready to go and he wants to get that 1st load. He would rather wait till his break is over to call. Richard is a bit more laid back, but has never turned down a load, and has always put forth his best to get the deal completed. It takes all kinds of people to get this messy business called trucking done. Richard is one of the top shelf guys in the industry. I am glad to have him on my board, as he helps me keep my ducks lined up. And we all know how important that is," Eade concluded.

CLIFF DORAN

AUGUST DRIVER OF THE MONTH



"My driver manager, Barbara Armstrong, and I hit it off right away. She is a good dispatcher as well as a beautiful person. I appreciate the open-door policy at National Carriers with no one to shoo you away in the offices. Everyone in the shop or office will take time to answer your questions. I was already aware of the National Carriers reputation in the freight business, so I knew this was where I wanted to be. NCI has met my expectations as a driver plus I enjoy that they are family oriented," Cliff shared.

Driver Manager Barbara Armstrong replied, "When Cliff came onto my board, I noticed he was a dedicated person wanting to work. He has a positive attitude and likes to get his job done. He also has a willingness to help where he is needed, when he is needed. At NCI dispatchers always say communication is the key for a good working relationship. He takes this very seriously by staying in touch with dispatch. Cliff is a very dedicated driver to the company. He appreciated being named Driver of the Month. He has done extremely well operating his truck, earning our Presidential Award of Excellence status three of the six quarters it has been offered. Again, his attention to detail helps him grow more successful. Cliff is a dedicated family man, so when he requests time off, we make it priority to get him home."



ALI ABDUL

SEPTEMBER DRIVER OF THE MONTH

Ali Abdul was chosen as September Driver of the Month for National Carriers. A native of Kenya, Africa, Ali began driving truck for National Carriers in February of 2016. In a short time, he proved to be a leader in deliveries, customer service and safety. Delivering freight on the 48 State fleet, Ali has an opportunity to experience the United States up close and personal.

"Ali has driven at National Carriers for over four years.

Another driver of ours referred him to NCI. Ali told me he couldn't believe how well the driver spoke of us. He was skeptical when he decided to apply, but now he calls NCI his home away from home," said Ed Kentner, Social Media Director.

Abdul recalled, "My Driver Manager is Logan Tenopir. When I started, he was also new. We bumped heads a little bit at first, but we quickly got past that. Now I don't think of him as my manager because he is my brother and my mentor. He understands me inside and out. He is the best driver manager ever."

"When I go to Africa to visit my family, our company allows me to take extended time off. Since I began working at National Carriers, I have been able to buy a farm for my family. My wife and children live in Kenya. When I come back to work, I always want Logan as my dispatcher and a Kenworth truck. The trucks are comfortable and reliable. I have driven Volvo, Freightliner and International trucks, but I think Kenworth is the best truck ever," Abdul said with a smile

KEVIN O'MOORE

OCTOBER DRIVER OF THE MONTH



Kevin O'moore was named October Driver of the Month.

Afterward, Director of Livestock Jason Greer commented, "Kevin is always the first one to arrive at our assigned location to load cattle. My department can rely on him to perform his job as he has done for the past twenty-plus years."

"I have continued hauling cows because it is what I like to do. I am fond of the people I work with, plus I am home each night. Every job has things we wish we didn't have to do; however, I enjoy hauling cattle and I appreciate the camaraderie I have with our other drivers. I enjoy living in the Liberal, Kansas, area. I look forward to retiring here with my wife," O'moore said.

"Why is Kevin good for NCI? Well, he's dedicated to his job. He shows up every single day without hesitation and stays until the work is finished. Whether there is rain, sleet or snow, he's here! Another reason he is good for NCI is because he cares. He cares about driving safely, he cares about handling cattle humanely and he cares what people think of him as a driver. Kevin lives by our NCI mission statement: to be the safest, most customer focused and successful driver in his class. An Elite driver and a true asset to NCI!" Greer concluded



ERNEST GARCIA

NOVEMBER DRIVER OF THE MONTH

Hailing from Lytle, Texas, Ernest Garcia joined National Carriers in 2011. His focus is delivering freight throughout the Southwest region of the United States. A veteran trucker for the past 40 years, he was named November Driver of the Month. He plans on finishing his driving career with National Carriers.

Garcia's driver manager Barbara Armstrong states, "My working relationship with Ernie is a good one. He is always pleasant to talk to and helpful when needed. Ernie has been with NCI for eight years, and has been on my board for the last four of those. He always has a pleasant attitude towards life and his job. He is consistently on time with his pickups and deliveries. He is committed to knowing his lanes, our customers, and providing timely service. Exhibiting these excellent attributes, Ernie deserved being named Driver of the Month."

"When Ernie and I started working together, he was a quiet person and didn't call me very often. It took a long while for him to warm up and communicate more frequently with me. Ernie stays out on the road and runs what we ask. He stays in his region and gets the job done. When we need to talk to each other, he always has a pleasant attitude. He achieved his status as Driver of Month due to his dedication to our company. Through hard work, he has earned a bonus each quarter and I am confident he will continue to maintain this performance in the future. Ernie stays out on the road for extended periods, only going home to visit his sister and relax," Armstrong shared.

REGGIE ELY

DECEMBER DRIVER OF THE MONTH



"Reggie is the kind of driver that makes being a driver manager easy. He is always willing to help out whenever he can. Even when having a bad day he is there when needed. I've been in trucking thirty-one years with twenty-seven as a driver and the last four years as driver manager. I have never seen a driver, including myself, who loves running loads to New York City. Reggie knows how to manage his clock making delivers on time whether it is one stop or five stops. He will stay out on the road from one to two months at a time. He has even cut his home time short if he is needed to run miles. Reggie is a valuable driver to National and the industry as a whole," shared Mike Holloway concerning December Driver of the Month Reggie Ely.

Ely responded, "I try to do things that challenge me while making me feel like I have accomplished something. I wanted to be a trucker who would deliver anywhere. I was scared the first couple of times I went into New York City, but it got easier and easier. I just had to face my fears."

He continued, "I think a driver is only as good as his driver manager. A good example of that was the difference between my last job and now. At my previous company I went through many dispatchers. Mike Holloway knows his job and has been my only dispatcher at NCI. I am grateful for that."

"What makes me a successful driver? Good equipment, good freight, and a team effort. I had no idea I could be treated this great by a trucking company," concluded Ely

