

# Welcome to... TRUCKER'S CONNECTION

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## Who's in Your Corner

By Michael Howe

## Cover Story

Like frustrated cell phone users, or the astronaut hovering thousands of miles above earth, truck drivers often wonder if anyone is actually looking out for them. Is anyone watching the backs of America's truck drivers, or are they all alone? Who is in your corner?

Well, the answer, perhaps somewhat surprisingly, is that there are quite a few organizations out there watching the backs of America's truck drivers. These organizations work behind the scenes to help drivers, while others are working right out in the open to improve driver benefits. Private carriers, private companies and trade organizations are all working on behalf of the driver, because drivers are the key to the industry. Just think about it, can the trucking industry thrive without the success of the drivers? The answer to that is, of course, no. Not a chance.

### Who's Looking Out for You?

Are you seeking organizations that look out for drivers and actually do something too? Chett Winchell, Denver Terminal Manager for the E.W. Wylie Corporation (<http://wylie trucking.com>), said that trade associations do a good job of it. "When you look at what the state trucking associations are doing, you see they do a number of good things for drivers. It's not just about representing the carriers—they actually watch out for the drivers too," said Winchell. He cited that state trucking associations watch trucking legislation, offer awards for safety and other honorable achievements, promote driver appreciation celebrations and much more. "The thing I like most about the state associations is that while most drivers don't have time to follow or pay close attention to the things they do, the associations still represent the drivers at the state level without being asked. I find their driver appreciation efforts and driver awards to be very important," explained Winchell.

In addition to state associations, Winchell mentioned Delta Nu Alpha (a trucking fraternity), the Council on Logistics and other local transportation clubs as good groups that also look out for drivers, even though their membership is mostly composed of management.

### the American Trucking Association

Of course, it didn't take long for Winchell to talk about the American Trucking Association (ATA) ([www.trucking.org](http://www.trucking.org)). The Mission Statement of the ATA pretty much says it all: "The mission of the American Trucking Association, Inc., is to serve and represent the interests of the trucking industry, with one united voice..."

What is sometimes misunderstood about the ATA, is that it serves the best interests of industry drivers too. Monitoring legislation to ensure reasonable hours-of-service, safety, security, quality of life and more, is a top priority of the ATA. But, it also does more for the drivers, such as promoting the national driver appreciation week, the national truck driving championships and the image of the trucking industry as a whole ([www.trucksbringit.com](http://www.trucksbringit.com)), as well as educating the public about trucks and truck safety ([www.atastr.org](http://www.atastr.org)).

One area that many people may not be aware of is the efforts the ATA goes through to assist potential drivers in breaking into the industry.

One of the primary reasons the ATA has taken the lead in helping potential drivers is due to the current driver shortage.

Mike Russell, spokesperson for ATA, said, "We have established partnerships with the military services, the Veterans Administration (VA), the AARP, the Truckload Carriers Association (TCA) and the Community College Network to help address the challenge."

The ATA's partnership with the military is designed to encourage trucking as a career for those

leaving the service. Their partnership with the TCA and the Community College Network is intended to increase enrollment in community college, truck-driver training programs, as these are generally accredited, and placement with carriers is a priority.

#### Caution: ATA Work Zone Ahead

The work the ATA is doing with the VA could also result in more opportunities for potential drivers. As it stands, the VA offers money for veterans to attend truck-driving school. While this is a good thing, the problem is, there are so many levels of bureaucracy within the VA that it takes a lot of time to be awarded the money, which causes challenges in paying for school and getting reimbursed. "What the ATA is doing with the VA is to eliminate some of the bureaucracy associated with distributing this money so it can be distributed faster," explained Russell.

#### Calling the AARP

Perhaps the most interesting partnership the ATA has is with AARP and its "Mature Worker" program. "Essentially, we are working with the AARP to encourage older couples to pursue a second career as a driving team. This way you get drivers that are already mature and responsible," suggests Russell.

#### "Good Stuff: Trucks Bring It"

The ATA's program "Good Stuff: Trucks Bring It" is a program intended to increase the morale and self-image of the truck driver, as well as making the public more aware of the good work truck drivers do. "With this program, a truck driving career will become more attractive, the pride of the industry will endure and the public will become more aware of the positive attributes of the industry. It's a great program," says Russell.

#### Carriers in Gear

So, the industry trade associations are working hard for truck drivers but what about carriers? There are several carriers, such as Prime, CFI, USA Truck, Maverick, Dart, Celadon, Sunco Carriers, KLLM and several other carriers, with innovative programs designed to help drivers succeed financially and personally. For instance, look at Landstar's Contractors' Advantage Purchasing Program (LCAPP) on-line at [www.lcapp.com](http://www.lcapp.com).

According to the LCAPP website, "LCAPP serves as the Landstar intermediary offering third-party discounts" on a variety of goods and services. Many of these programs offer discounts on items that truck drivers already purchase, such as trucks, trailers, warranties, tires, fuel, parts, service, telecommunications, computer items and much, much more. Instead of paying full price, operators receive discounts on these items, which in turn, increases the drivers' profits.

#### The USNow Solution

Then, of course, there are private companies (not carriers) that offer a variety of products and services to drivers that are truly intended to increase the likelihood of success as a truck driver. USNow ([www.usnow.com](http://www.usnow.com), 1-800-694-9888 x357) ventured into the trucking industry in 2003 to offer an affordable limited health care plan to owner-operators. David Lindsey, CEO and Founder of USNow, started the company in 1995 to offer different benefit programs to employers who needed sensible solutions to the high cost of health insurance.

USNow writes 5-10 of the top plans for owner-operators, which includes opportunities for low cost physicians, low cost hospital stays, and they even manage the benefits for the carriers involved. Another low cost benefit plan includes dental.

Prices can range from \$75 to \$195 per month and include prescription plans and life insurance. It is offered in 42 states through trucking companies, allowing USNow to talk to owner-operators and deduct the premium directly from the driver settlements. "This really takes the place of major health plans for owner-operators. Our Driver's Advantage Plan offers short-term disability, personal accident, dental and critical accident insurance. We are in the trucking industry to help the owner-operator," stated Lindsey.

#### UFS Insight to the Rescue

Some private businesses offer other valuable teaching services to the trucking industry. Linda Yates is the President and CEO of UFS Insight, Inc, ([www.expresstrucking.com](http://www.expresstrucking.com)), which offers business training to drivers in the expedited segment of the

trucking industry.

Yates has real experience in the industry, real knowledge of the industry and is now using that to help other drivers succeed.

"Realizing the lifestyle demands, and profitability challenges presented by the nature of the expediting business, we personalized our truck with a "White Tiger" mural, which immediately became our icon and nickname in the public's eye," explained Yates.

Because they were so noticeable, people began to seek them to find out about expediting and ask their advice, which leads to Linda's current passion.

"Our services include a network of several internet destinations for trucking information, individual consultation, training sessions and seminars held through the country and the Expedite InfoCenter, which is an expedite information hub appearing at four major truck shows," says Yates.

Layover.com is Free

One other group worth mentioning that is "In Your Corner," for drivers is Layover.com ([www.layover.com](http://www.layover.com)). This primary focus is helping drivers find jobs, and the service is free. Randy Racioppi, Spokesperson, said, "Currently we work with about 100 carriers, allowing drivers to fill out one application and apply to all they qualify for."

In other words, if a driver fills out an application and meets the requirements of 75 companies, his or her application is then sent to 75 companies.

A very important part of the site is the content. The purpose of the content is to provide drivers with one place to get all the information they need about trucking.

The important thing to remember is that no driver is alone out there. There are thousands of support people that make a living working behind the scenes to help you, the truck drivers, stay on the road and in business. There are hundreds of trade magazines and carriers and at least that many organizations that are "in your corner" too. Henry Ford once said, "Remember the banana—when it left the bunch, it got skinned." Any driver trying to make it on his own, without any support from others, whether directly or indirectly, will probably meet the same fate as the banana. Don't be the banana; reach out and embrace your support.

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