

SAFETY TAKES PRIORITY



By Barbara Oringderff
Louis Thompson, incoming president of the Kansas Motor Carriers Association (KMCA) is the Safety Director for Beaver Express, which is headquartered in Woodward, Oklahoma.

In years past, we have used Beaver Express to ship boxes of Territorial magazines from our printer in Topeka to Garden City. Beaver Express is an LTL (Less than Truckload) carrier, so it was perfect for us because we didn't have to fill the truck. I guess that's why I thought Beaver Express was a little company named for the small town of Beaver, OK.

Well, I was partly right! Louis Thompson told me when we spoke on the phone that, "Beaver Express was started in 1943 by one man, entrepreneur Floyd Hamm, with one truck hauling newspapers and mail from Woodward to Beaver. In the tradition of the railroads, he named his truck line for the furthest point it served, which was Beaver."

Celebrating its 70th anniversary this year, Beaver Express is not a "little"

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company. The freight line serves 3,200 cities in Oklahoma, Kansas, Missouri, Arkansas, Texas and New Mexico, has 380 employees in 23 company locations, and owns about 350 trucks and 500 semitrailers. "We also have some lease contractors, and we have about 145 small contractors who work the smaller towns for us," he explained. Today, Beaver Express owned by Mike and Brian Stone and Rick Frech, all of Woodward, is recognized as the largest and oldest family owned and operated package express and LTL freight service in the state of Oklahoma.

Thompson, who has been with the company since 2006, is responsible for all safety and training, security, screening and hiring new employees, and also is responsible for the company's drug and alcohol testing program.

"This testing is required for all drivers under federal law," Thompson explained, "but we have a program where all of our employees submit to random testing. My job also includes purchasing and maintaining all of our equipment,



as well as overseeing the safety of our trucks on the road. We buy mostly International, Freightliner and Volvo tractors, but we have a few Sterlings. I do get to test drive them, and that's about the only time I get to drive a truck any more!" said Thompson, who has one daughter, Jennifer, the mother of his only grandchild, Gabriel, back in Ohio. It does look, however, like the director is in this part of the country to stay because he and Lisa Duerson, a Woodward, OK elementary school counselor, will be married in Woodward the latter part of this month (July).

"Before I drove a truck for a living I was a foreman in a plastics plant, and then I started driving a truck hauling ice cream and other milk products. Later, I drove a truck for my own company, Eagle's Glory Trucking, Inc. out of Colorado, which I started in 1993," said Thompson. "I personally have 2.8 million accident-free miles."

In the time between closing his own company, which served 49 states, and starting work with Beaver Express

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in 2006, Thompson earned his bachelor's degree, and, in 2007, his master's degree in business administration and transportation management. "Thanks to the internet!" he said.

The director has since earned his Certified Director of Safety designation, a national certification, and was named the KMCA Safety Professional of the Year in 2011. (He also received the Oklahoma Safety Professional of the Year award in 2010.)

"We're very proud that last year our insurance company, Great West Casualty Company, gave Beaver Express its Platinum Award for highway safety. Beaver Express has actually earned that award three of the last four years!" he added.

As KMCA president, Thompson will be going to Washington, D.C. as part of the Kansas delegation when they attend the annual Call on Washington. The group will be led by longtime KMCA Executive Director Tom Whitaker, who is well-known and respected by other state

executive directors and by senators and representatives in Washington. "I'm sure I'll learn a lot!" commented Thompson. "With all the proposed new rules coming out of Washington this year, there are a variety of issues that will be affected. Of course, highway safety is always at the top

of the list. The industry has to adapt to all the government changes so that our safety ratings do not suffer."

"It's a tremendous honor to be given the opportunity to lead the Kansas Motor Carriers organization, and I'm looking forward to it," he concluded. 



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