



The Long Haul: 50 Years of Wayne Smith Trucking

It has been 50 years since the late Wayne Smith purchased two trucks and five trailers to start Wayne Smith Trucking. An anniversary like that is a monumental one for any company, but amid the day-to-day of running a successful logistics company, President Neil Corder — Smith's son-in-law — admits "it snuck up on us." Still, reaching such a milestone is something the company doesn't take for granted.

"It is kind of neat, the more we think about it," Corder said, reflecting on being among the most tenured trucking companies in the state.

Since its founding in 1976, Wayne Smith Trucking has grown to 115 trucks, 600 trailers, and about 170 employees, with operations that reach across all the lower 48 states.

How did Wayne Smith Trucking get here after half a century in business?

"Time, good people, and the right opportunities," Corder said.

Corder married Smith's daughter, Michele Corder, who serves as one of three co-owners along with her sister, Tonya Simer, and mother, Peggy Smith. When Neil Corder started working at the company in 1993, it had about 30 trucks, a number that grew to more than 100 by the time it celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2001.

"We like slow growth. We want to stay, to an extent, local," Corder said. "We like seeing our trucks weekly and monthly. We like making sure they're being taken care of, and you lose that personal level at a certain point."



There's a balance Wayne Smith Trucking has struck in its pace of growth that allows it to prosper while staying true to the roots that have sustained it for so long.

"It's easy to jump out there too far," Corder said. "We have friends who have bought companies, immediately expanded, and then shrunk back down."

That slow growth also keeps the company's family atmosphere intact.

"Our dispatchers talk to our drivers, maybe not every single day, but we know them by name, not their truck number," Corder said. "That is one of our litmus tests. When we stop knowing them by name, are we too big?"

Even for a company that prides itself on staying small, Wayne Smith Trucking's reach extends well beyond Morrilton and central Arkansas. While most of its freight originates in Arkansas, its service area is almost nationwide.

Wayne Smith Trucking's operation is 70% van and 30% flatbed, with the van division consisting of dedicated and over-the-road long-haul fleets. The dedicated fleet consists of drivers who deliver within roughly 200 miles and are tied to specific customer contracts. The over-the-road fleet can take drivers all over the country to complete a shipment.

About 30% of Wayne Smith Trucking's operation is flatbed dedicated to three customers. Paper products are about 70% of what the company hauls for clients like Green Bay Packaging, International Paper, Amcor, and Waste Management.

Looking toward the future, Corder said he'd like to see Wayne Smith Trucking move into refrigerated hauling, known in the industry as reefers.

"It adds diversification to our operations and would give us more stability in downturns," he said.

Looking at the next three to five years, Corder said he would like to add 30 to 50 new trucks, along with new clients.

"We have the ability to add another 50 trucks without it changing us much internally," Corder said.

It has historically been difficult to add new customers, but Corder said things have improved recently due to capacity leaving the market and industry consolidation.

"It has always been hard to get into a new customer, but now, they're reaching out to us," he said. "We have had calls from two or three different large companies wanting us to bid on their freight. We will probably be able to get into two new companies this year, just simply because of trucking capacity leaving the market."

Looking back on 50 years and ahead to the future, Corder said he's happy to come to work every day and collaborate with a team he appreciates. It is a team that includes several multigenerational families who have worked, or still work, for the company.

"It means we did it right," he said. "It means we were a good enough company that someone wanted their son or daughter to go to work for us. I would like to sit here and tell you I did this, but I didn't. Most of our success has come from our entire team."