

Rewards of a revolution



the **successful**
dealer
award

How Doggett Freightliner was able to build a *Successful Dealer Award*-winning operation after a 2018 acquisition

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A revolution is underway at Doggett Freightliner of Arkansas. It started last May when the company was acquired by Leslie Doggett Industries and brought into the Doggett Truck Group family of dealerships.

Before the sale, the North Little Rock facility had been a steady, successful Freightliner dealer for 30 years, says General Manager Brett Graves, serving a diverse customer base throughout central Arkansas. When the transaction was announced, Graves says the news was met with excitement but also some apprehension by the dealership's employees. Associates were eager about the new challenge but aware the status quo they'd become accustomed to would shift.

Looking back now, Graves says the transition has been better than any associate could have possibly imagined.

Doggett Freightliner of Arkansas is flourishing.

"Every one of our departments is up and some are up considerably," he



Every department at Doggett Freightliner of Arkansas has shown year over year sales growth since the business was acquired last spring.

says. “All of our key departments are exceeding where they were before [the acquisition]. Employees are happier and more productive ... and customers are telling us they can see it.”

And if they couldn’t see it before, they sure can now, as Doggett Freightliner of Arkansas was named the winner of the 2019 *Successful Dealer Award* during a presentation in August at the Great American Trucking Show in Dallas.

Sponsored by Automann, Interstate Billing and National Truck Protection/Premium 2000, the *Successful Dealer Award* seeks to recognize and honor North America’s best medium- and heavy-duty truck dealers for their efforts serving their customers and their communities.

Doggett Freightliner — a previous award finalist in 2015 and 2017 — earned this year’s award over other finalists Kansas City Freightliner, The Larson Group, Truck Center Companies and Truck Country/Stoops Freightliner-Quality Trailer due to its impressive commitment in both areas.

Parts Manager Lem Wallace says every change implemented in North Little Rock over the last 17 months has been executed with customer experience in mind, transforming and reinvigorating the dealership to thrive at a level once thought impossible.

“One of the hardest things I’ve ever had to go through in my career was an acquisition,” says Wallace, who has worked at the North Little Rock facility for 21 years. “Being acquired was scary for us. But Doggett immediately brought in a family atmosphere. The high spirits just rolled off of them.”

“The biggest thing they did was they empowered our employees,” adds Graves. “That’s a big part of their

2019 finalist



Kansas City Freightliner

Prior finalist: 2016 (as Westfall O’Dell dealer group)

Kansas City Freightliner is a six-location medium- and heavy-duty truck franchise based in Kansas City, Mo. The business exists within the larger Westfall O’Dell dealer group, which operates a number of separate light-, medium- and heavy-duty franchises from Nashville, Tenn., to Cheyenne, Wyo.

Kansas City Freightliner earned high marks in this year’s *Successful Dealer Award* program thanks to its knowledgeable, veteran team of employees that help keep the business agile in an increasingly competitive and challenging trucking environment.

“Our decades of industry knowledge help us to provide invaluable direction for our customers with the goal of making them as successful as possible,” says General Manager Mike Westfall.

Other impressive corporate attributes of Kansas City Freightliner are the company’s commitment to Elite Support — where more than 90 percent of its technicians maintain Professional Level chassis certification on the Freightliner product — continuous improvement and customer education and training.

Regarding the latter, Westfall says representatives from Kansas City Freightliner frequently travel to customer locations and spend the day doing hands-on training with software. The company boasts it has customers “who save thousands in maintenance costs” by using these programs.

Kansas City Freightliner is expectedly active in its community as well. The dealer is a key sponsor of the diesel technical program at Kansas City Kansas Community College, where Westfall says more than 40 technicians have been trained in three years “at no cost to the student” thanks to the dealer’s generosity.

2019 finalist



The Larson Group

Prior finalist: 2018

The Larson Group was the only non-Daimler-associated dealer business and the only repeat finalist in this year's *Successful Dealer Award* program.

Headquartered in Springfield, Mo., The Larson Group is a 21-store Peterbilt business that stretches from the Show-Me state to the Carolinas.

The company's position in this year's award program was partly attributed to corporate culture of customer satisfaction that focuses on solutions and never being forced to tell a customer "no." CEO Glenn Larson says both come from the commitment he and his father made when founding the company that said even if the business wasn't the biggest dealer in the market, it could always strive to be the best.

"If a customer reaches out to us, we always want to help them," he says. "We want to make it easier for them to do business."

The Larson Group's focus on hiring and employee development also helped it repeat as a finalist for this year's award. Regarding hiring, COO Kory Larson says The Larson Group recently added personality testing as a step within its hiring process, which has helped the dealer better identify people who have the right traits to fill open positions within the business.

Other customer service efforts such as its 24-hour call center and expanding mobile service business also helped the business earn high marks in this year's program, as did its impressive list of charitable causes and community events the business supports.



From left: Wade Bontrager, National Truck Protection Co. Inc.; Steve Hancock, Brett Graves, Paul Burk, Doggett Freightliner; Lucas Deal, *Successful Dealer*; Harjeev Khanduja, Automann; Steve Williams, Interstate Billing; during the 2019 *Successful Dealer Award* presentation at the Great American Trucking Show.

culture. They've allowed our people to take ownership of their own jobs."

The duo says North Little Rock's wins generated by the new organizational structure have been numerous. Customer satisfaction is up across the board, as is performance in the sales department and service bays. And buoyed by the training resources now available to them through Doggett Truck Group, technicians from the North Little Rock facility helped Doggett Freightliner win first place in the team competition at the 2019 Arkansas Trucking Association technician competition.

New Truck Sales Manager Steve Hancock says things are going so well employees have started coming up to him asking, "Is it really this good? I never dreamed it could be like this."

"For us it's all about the customer," he says. "Our owner Leslie Doggett pushes world class service and believes if we take care of our customers and build those relationships, those partnerships allow both of us to succeed."

"When everybody works together for the customer everybody gets to win," adds Doggett Freightliner Vice President Paul Burk.

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— Steve Hancock, new truck sales manager, Doggett Truck Group

2019 finalist



Truck Center Companies

Prior finalist: none

Truck Center Companies was named a finalist for the *Successful Dealer Award* for the first time in 2019 on the back of its corporate pillars of integrity, excellence, teamwork and community involvement.

Founded as the two-store Omaha Truck Center in 1975, the dealer group now known as Truck Center Companies has used those pillars to grow into a 10-location business across three states that employs more than 600 people.

“We have a burning desire to be one of the best, if not the best, truck and trailer dealers in the country,” says Executive Vice President Matt Hoskinson. “Our core values pretty simply tie into that — they are what it means to us to be a great company.”

Those values were clear in the company’s submission for this year’s *Successful Dealer Award*. Truck Center Companies is a vanguard of dealer program development for Freightliner and Daimler Trucks North America, led by CEO and 2019 American Truck Dealers’ Dealer of the Year Trey Mytty, who also serves as chair of the Freightliner dealer council. In his position of leadership, Mytty has helped Truck Center Companies to implement some of the most pioneering and unique customer service programs in the trucking industry. Truck Center Companies also has independently invested in internal continuous improvement and mentorship programs to strengthen its corporate processes and staff skills.

Combined with its community efforts (the dealer has helped raise more than \$3 million for Make-a-Wish since 1995), Truck Center Companies was an easy finalist pick in 2019.



Doggett Freightliner is a benefactor of Be Pro Be Proud, an Arkansas Chamber of Commerce program that educates high school students about vocational career opportunities.

Yet Doggett Freightliner’s selection as the 2019 *Successful Dealer Award* winner wasn’t earned exclusively due to its North Little Rock renaissance. The business also invests heavily in customer and staff training — Graves calls the company’s technician training center “the finest he has ever seen” — and is working to reduce its carbon footprint with a new lighting system and reusable container program with its suppliers.

Additionally, he says many of the dealership’s departments have seen reduced employee turnover despite growing significantly. Service Manager Chris Gray says his workforce has more than doubled in less than two years — and he hasn’t had to recruit much to add those employees.

“It’s been a lot of word of mouth,” he says. “Our techs are telling their buddies to come work for us.”

Despite its individual recruiting success, Doggett Freightliner also remains engaged in strengthening the nation’s technician force. The dealer is a major donor to and supporter of Be Pro Be Proud, an Arkansas Chamber of Commerce program that educates high school students about vocational career opportunities, while also remaining engaged with the diesel and heavy truck vo-tech programs in the North Little Rock area.

The company’s community involvement is equally exceptional.

In North Little Rock, the company is an active participant in the Arkansas State Police Department’s Truck Convoy for the Special Olympics. More than 60 employees volunteered at this year’s event, which the company states is the largest charitable truck convoy in the U.S.



It's an event that "brings our entire community together," says Graves.

The company also donates to local children's hospitals, veterans' associations, scholarship programs, youth sports and many more.

"We're taking part in more events now than I can possibly recall," Graves jokes.

The North Little Rock crew is optimistic such community involvement and corporate growth will only continue as the facility becomes more enriched by Doggett's culture.

"We believe we live what the dealership model should be," says Hancock.

Doggett's win is the second in a row for the Freightliner dealer network.

Previous *Successful Dealer* Award winners were TEC Equipment (2013), Truck Centers Inc. (2014), Freightliner of St. Cloud (2015), River States Truck and Trailer (2016), Inland Kenworth (2017) and Four Star Freightliner (2018).

Graves, Hancock and Burk were presented the *Successful Dealer* Award by *Trucks, Parts, Service* Editor Lucas Deal and award sponsor representatives Harjeev Khanduja from Automann, Steve Williams from Interstate Billing and Wade Bontrager from Premium 2000/National Truck Protection. ◀

2019 finalist



Truck Country/Stoops Freightliner-Quality Trailer

Prior finalist: 2013, 2014 (Stoops Freightliner-Quality Trailer); 2016 (McCoy Group).

Truck Country/Stoops Freightliner-Quality Trailer represent the two retail dealer franchises of the McCoy Group, a diversified commercial equipment business headquartered in Dubuque, Iowa.

The company earned its second combined *Successful Dealer* Award nomination and fourth overall (Stoops Freightliner-Quality Trailer earned two nominations before being acquired in 2014) in 2019 on the strength of customer responsiveness processes and go-to-market strategy.

"My grandfather Bob McCoy sold his first truck in 1958 and we've been trying to do the best we can to take care of our customers ever since," says Brian McCoy, president, Stoops Freightliner-Quality Trailer. "We want to be the experts they can rely on ... the people who can get their truck in and out and back on the road as fast as possible with a quality repair at a fair price."

The dealer franchises do that by using time-tested processes and procedures to maintain efficiency throughout its business while also relying on a continuous improvement team to expertly implement new best practices whenever necessary.

"We try to stay nimble so we're able to change what our customer focus is based on their needs," McCoy says.

Another resource in the company's drive toward customer satisfaction are a pair of corporate training centers that serve primarily as technician training centers but also can be used as continuing education centers for other departments.

When combined with the company's larger community service projects (supporting Habitat for Humanity and veteran's programs, among others), each helped the company earn its award nomination this year.