Recognizing Top Rookie Veteran Serving as Commercial Truck Driver

KIRKLAND, Wash. – As the June 25 deadline for nomination approaches, Kenworth, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation’s Hiring our Heroes Program and FASTPORT will look to find America’s top rookie military veteran who is driving for a commercial fleet after retiring from the U.S. Armed Forces.

Under the “Transition Trucking: Driving for Excellence” recognition program, Kenworth will again provide the top award – a Kenworth T680 fully loaded with a 76-inch sleeper and the PACCAR Powertrain, which includes the PACCAR MX-13 engine, PACCAR 12-speed automated transmission, and PACCAR 40K tandem rear axles.

“This is a wonderful opportunity for fleets to recognize and nominate veterans that have excelled in their transition to working in the trucking industry,” said Kurt Swihart, Kenworth marketing director. “A well-deserving veteran will receive the keys to a Kenworth T680 – courtesy of Kenworth – as America’s top rookie military veteran in the industry.”

The program is entering its fourth year of providing military veterans, now driving for a commercial fleet, the opportunity to become an independent contractor through the ownership of their very own Kenworth T680.

To be eligible to win the Transition Trucking: Driving for Excellence Award, candidates must meet all of the following criteria:

--Military veteran or current or former member of the National Guard or Reserves.

--Graduate of a PTDI-certified, NAPFTDS or CVTA member driver training school, and a current CDL holder.

--Employed by any for-hire carrier or private fleet trucking company that has pledged to hire veterans through the Trucking Track Mentoring Program (https://truckingtrack.org).

--First employed as a CDL driver in trucking between January 1, 2018 and June 25, 2019.

--Legal resident of the continental United States.

Full criteria and online nomination forms can be found on the “Transition Trucking: Driving for Excellence” website (www.transitiontrucking.org).

An expert panel of judges will determine the top rookie based on criteria in the contest rules, including availability of loads, on time delivery, highway safety performance, customer relations, work record, military service record, and non-job related activities/community service.

The Hiring our Heroes program runs throughout the year, with hiring fairs slated at military bases, truck industry events, and at venues near military bases. The Kenworth T680 Advantage will be on display at selected events to inform and inspire those looking at trucking as a possible career. For more information, visit the websites of FASTPORT (www.fastport.com) and Hiring Our Heroes (www.uschamberfoundation.org/hiring-our-heroes).

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Past Transition Trucking: Driving for Excellence Award Winners: Where They Are Now

2016 Winner: Troy Davidson

For Troy Davidson, the inaugural “Transition Trucking: Driving for Excellence Award top military rookie driver in 2016, receiving the keys to his Kenworth T680 has completely changed his life. Davidson, who was nominated by Werner Enterprises for the award, now has 350,000 miles under his belt in his Kenworth T680. Davidson is currently leased on with Wenger Truck Lines.

“I’m having a great time. It’s incredible how many opportunities have opened up for me since receiving my Kenworth T680,” said Davidson, a former crew chief with the famed Blue Angels. “I’ve visited all the states in the continental U.S. I constantly meet people on the road who recognize me from the Transition Trucking program, which helps me build connections in the industry.”

According to Davidson, the Kenworth T680 is running as strong as the day he received it. “I couldn’t be happier with my Kenworth T680, which has been very reliable. Not only does it offer a comfortable ride and place to stay, the T680 is a great truck to drive. The PACCAR MX-13 engine provides me great fuel efficiency without sacrificing the power I need to traverse up a steep grade. I’m excited to continue to explore the country and tack on another 350,000 miles.”

2017 Winner: Gregg Softy

For Gregg Softy, retired U.S. Army lieutenant colonel and the 2017 Transition Trucking: Driving for Excellence Award winner, life on the road has never been better. Since being nominated for the award by Stevens Transport, Softy continues to work with the company as an owner-operator. On average, Softy will tack on 10,000 to 12,000 miles a month.

Transitioning to life after the military can often be a difficult time for veterans as they seek out what to do in the next stage of life. After retiring from the military, Softy knew he wanted to pursue a career in the trucking industry, since he had experience operating heavy equipment.

“I have always been fascinated by heavy machinery. I thought becoming a truck driver would be a natural transition. Many veterans believe they can do well in the trucking industry. If you work hard, you can excel as a driver. Of course, I wouldn’t be where I am today without the great support from my family, friends, and those I’ve met in the industry. I feel fortunate to have won the Transition Trucking: Driving for Excellence Award,” said Softy.
“I can’t speak highly enough about the support from Stevens Transport. Winning this award opened so many doors for me in my career. The people I’ve met and the connections I’ve made, as well as the financial opportunity I have working as an owner-operator, is something I only dreamed of when I first started in the industry. The Transition Trucking: Driving for Excellence recognition program provides an incredible opportunity for us new drivers in the industry, as well as to share the stories of amazing veterans,” Softy said.

2018 Winner: Quinton Ward

Quinton Ward, former U.S. Army mechanic, instructor, career counselor, and top military rookie driver in 2018, appreciates the opportunity the Transition Trucking: Driving for Excellence program offers veterans.

“Transitioning into any new career field can be difficult and for veterans coming out of the service, that challenge can be even greater,” said Ward. “Nominating military rookie drivers not only shows a company’s dedication to its service members, but it also allows those military rookies the opportunities to network within the industry.”

According to Ward, the Kenworth T680 he was awarded has tacked on more than 47,000 miles since he received the truck in December 2018. The Kenworth T680 operates under Werner Enterprises and is a part of the Operation Freedom fleet, which consists of nine military themed trucks, piloted by veterans – used to honor and recruit military members. Ward’s truck honors military service dogs with his special commemorative wrap.

“My service dog, Kirra really helped me in my recovery process after medically retiring from the military due to injury,” said Ward. “The truck is a big hit on the road. The Kenworth T680 garners a lot of attention from drivers at truck stops who like to take photos and chat about the meaning behind the service dog wrap.”

Since receiving the Kenworth T680, Ward said more opportunities have opened up for his personal growth in the industry. “Winning this truck has given me the opportunity to become more financially secure and grow within the industry at lightning speed. My goal is to build a future within this industry, which is the backbone of the economy,” said Ward.

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