



The kids are alright

ALL IN THE FAMILY: Arron Attard is the youngest of the Attard family to launch a career behind the wheel. Father Steve founded S&S Trucking which has provided a launching pad for the careers of his children. *Photo by Daniela Piteo*

Who says today's youth aren't into trucking? For this small Ontario fleet, trucking is still a family affair.

By Daniela Piteo

GEORGETOWN, Ont. – It's do or die in the trucking industry. The industry is, for Steve Attard and his family, their livelihood, their passion and soon, their legacy.

Attard got behind the wheel of a truck at a young age, following in his father's stead. As soon as he could put

the money together, he bought himself his first set of wheels.

"When I was 18 years old, I bought my first truck. I couldn't even use it. I was (unemployable), because in the 1980s you had to be 21 years old to drive," Attard said.

Attard always had a passion for trucks and decided to eek his way into

the industry at a slow but steady pace.

"At first, I started making small deliveries, until I became an owner/operator," said Attard.

After many years of working for other companies, Attard decided to branch out on his own; after all, he had been a private business owner as

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a teen. As a teen, and working for a union, Attard was taught to splice cables by hand – a skill not acquired by many.

"An old army captain taught me how to hand-splice these chokers and the reason why he did that was because I was in a union working part-time and no one could bump me, because no one knew how to do it," Attard said. "Every so often, a customer would come in and ask, 'who is doing that?' It's a trade and its unheard of now."

He began to recognize a specialized need in a niche market, so he branched out and registered as a small business working from his father's garage and had founded own company, Steve Slings.

"I ended up selling my business to a large firm in Hamilton, CanSling, from there I still had the registered business, so I kept the S&S name," Attard said. He didn't enter the business world again for many years later, until he was at a crossroads after losing a comfortable position in management for a contracting company.

Attard was in his early thirties, looking after his three children on his own and out of work. As a teen he had his own registered business and by the time he entered his early twenties he owned and operated his own truck. His entrepreneurial spirit surfaced once more. He made a swift decision to go out on his own again, and build a small business.

"It was do or die," Attard said. "It happened so fast, I didn't have time to think about where I was going. I relied on my gut instinct and building a business just felt right."

His gut was right and for the last 15 years, he has been running S&S Transport, which started out small and currently runs 15 trucks. The early days of S&S Transport weren't easy, especially with three young children – one in diapers – at home.

"How does a woman go to work all day, then come home and cook and clean and keep house?" Attard said, noting that while some men bear the responsibility as a provider and caregiver, in his experience, the onus was usually on women. "It is a tough thing to do. Looking back, considering all the sleepless nights I've had, I would have probably run the other way."

As business slowly began to pick up, Attard had live-in help, which alleviated a tremendous amount of stress and allowed him to be both a better father and business owner.

"Life doesn't wait for anyone," Attard said, recalling that the impetus for starting a new business came from losing a job. "You have to wake up and smarten up. In fact, this experience has made me a way better father because I had to support and raise my family on my own – we're such a tight-knit group."

Attard believes the success of his company grew from the attention he paid to both his staff and customers.

"My edge is, we are family and we care," said Attard. "I'm not saying other companies don't care, but when you call S&S you won't get a secretary, you almost always get me. My opinion is that a lot of these large

companies are so large, they're not connected to their staff. Their employees have the attitude of, 'I'm just a number here.'"

It is important, according to Attard, that his staff are always treated like family so an atmosphere of pulling together and working together is established.

It isn't just a familial and congenial attitude that drives S&S Transport.

"A successful company doesn't just ship and receive, but they try and get involved with areas and build a strong rapport with customers," Attard said. "There is a bond with my customers and they expect to get a hold of me. Everything I have in life I owe to my customers."

Customers obviously help fuel his business, but reliable equipment is an integral asset.

"Most of our trucks are Macks and 90% of them are brand new," Attard said. "I went with Mack, even though there are many different trucks out there, because anyone can buy a brand new truck, but they have the best service. When a truck is running great, they're all great. It's the service that matters."

Even with some lean times in his books, Attard has managed to stay afloat during the recent recession that struck hard during 2008 and 2009.

According to Attard, they weren't hit extremely hard by the recession because the condominium industry booms during an economic downturn.

"It was going very strong for us for the simple reason that recessions, in the condo business, is a very busy time for us. In condo growth, contractors take advantage of the re-

cession, because everything is at the lowest price it could possibly be," said Attard. "Most recessions are two to three years and at that time, the condos are being sold, so that's how we fall into that. When things are booming, (contractors) don't start breaking ground, but when things start falling they start breaking ground."

The industry has been known to have its challenges, but Attard sees opportunity for change that could make it better.

"I think electronic logbooks would be a great thing. It might be a challenge to adapt the drivers to the system, but once you do it'll be a great system," Attard said. "It will be easier for the office, less paperwork, which is a great thing because it is better for the environment and I think it will be more accurate information."

But it isn't just about tracking in-

'My edge is, we are family and we care.'

Steve Attard, S&S

formation, Attard is concerned that too many young and inexperienced drivers are on the road as a solution for the impending threat of a driver shortage.

"I'm definitely concerned because there is a driver shortage and I feel a lot of the training facilities out there are teaching drivers too fast," said Attard. "Let's face it, everyone wants to get on the road as fast as they can, but I don't think drivers are really up to what they are getting involved in – the actual hazards – and that is what scares me most of all. I don't think there is enough training and I don't think believe in two weeks or three weeks, that is enough to give a driver a licence."

Attard believes a minimum of three months' training and numerous long hours should be mandatory.

"Are we that busy that we are just throwing people in trucks and taking chances?" Attard questioned.

It hasn't just been tough issues and highs and lows that Attard has experienced while owning a business, the

road has taken him down paths that are hard to forget.

"I love the adventure," Attard said. "If you are happy in trucking, every day is like a holiday. We get to see so many different aspects of our country. We have so many jewels in our country you could spend your entire life exploring Canada."

But not everything Attard has seen has been uplifting.

"We were hired to haul a lot of the supports used during the aftermath of 9/11," said Attard. "We had specialty equipment that could haul reinforcements into Manhattan."

An S&S Transport customer manufactured 65-ft. support tubes that Attard had previously hauled, and when it got the call to bring its tubes to Manhattan, the customer thought of Attard and his trucks. It would be the first time S&S Transport branched into the US.

"We went three months back and forth hauling material to ground zero," said Attard. "It was the scari-



LONG HAUL: At just 19, Kyle Attard has already done a cross-country haul to Nanaimo, B.C.

est thing I have ever seen and the saddest thing I have ever seen. I didn't even witness the actual incident. I just saw the aftermath. I still remember conversations I've had with firefighters to this day and other people that worked close by."

Chad, a NYC firefighter, was at his

son's birthday party on September 11 and by the time he got the call to go to the site, four of his friends had already been killed.

"At the time, his friends had been trapped in the rubble, but it wouldn't be until later that he discovered his friends, the men he worked with, had all died," Attard said.

Each story he heard from witnesses and survivors became grimmer.

"You could see the devastation, the cracks in buildings, from four blocks away," Attard said.

The three months he spent on the road were trying, but it is an experience he'll never forget and he'll always be proud that he could help during the distressing months that followed the attacks.

It is that type of work – strenuous, tiresome and emotionally taxing, but eventually rewarding – which brought Attard's two sons and daughter into the business.

He always encouraged his children to follow their hearts and never expected them to follow in the family tradition of driving truck.

"But they fell in love with trucking and they love what we do," Attard said. "They are happy, they have a great income and that is half the battle in life."

Kyle, Steve's oldest son, has been driving for one year. At 19, he's certain that he has made the right career choice.

"I've always been with my dad, since I was a little kid and I developed a passion for it. I just something I knew I wanted to do," Kyle said.

Kyle foresees long-term contentment in the field, he loves the work, respects his co-workers and the job keeps him active.

With only one year that separates Kyle and Arron, a healthy dose of friendly rivalry exists between them – especially when determining who is better behind the wheel.

"My dad's attitude is generally positive so everyone around him tends to be happy. It's a great working environment," said Arron.

Aside from the positives, both brothers acknowledge that the job comes with its fair share of perils.

"It is definitely a dangerous job and you have to be careful," said Arron.

The youngest family member, 15-year-old Kaitlin, also helps in the yard on her time off from school shunting trailers.

"Shunting is something to get used to, it's not the easiest thing to do. You follow instructions and I have three great trainers that help me out," Kaitlin said.

"I might get my licence just to help out, but I don't know what I really want to do," she added.

While Kaitlin is considering pursuing a career in law, it is clear that the three young adults are drawn to the business.

"We are not just ordinary truck drivers, we get out on site and do whatever is asked of us. It keeps us active," said Kyle.

"We do whatever we can do to help out," Aaron added.

In the last year, Attard's partner Cathy Berardicurti and her daughter Sarah, have joined S&S Transport.

With his family on board, he knows that one day he can pass the business down to his children, but in the meantime, it'll still be Steve answering the call. □