

Billy Hines
NATURAL WISDOM

ARKANSAS T R E P O R T TRUCKING

FUEL PRICES • OWNER-OPERATORS • SUBROGATION



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COVER IMAGE OF BILLY HINES BY JON D. KENNEDY.

BILLY HINES HAS PROVED THAT ONE MAN'S TRASH IS ANOTHER MAN'S TREASURE.

By Steve Brawner

Contributing Writer

Photography by Jon D. Kennedy



TWO ANTIQUE RED TRUCKS WITH LOADED SINGLE-AXLE

log trailers look like they are ready to pull out of the parking lot at J.D. and Billy Hines Trucking in Prescott and deliver their loads.

Bought and restored about 15 years ago, they aren't going anywhere. Their purpose is simple—to welcome visitors and pay homage to the company's past. Besides, the wood looks like it might be on its way to being petrified.

With 250 employees and more than 160 trucks, the company can afford to let a couple of loads sit while its single-wheeled trucks haul logging products and building materials throughout the Southeast. And after decades of hard work, Billy Hines can afford to relax and wait just a little, in this case for the wind to die down as he poses for photos beside one of those antique trucks.

Hines' passion for restoration extends far beyond trucks. In fact, he's largely built his business on the concept. Hines Trucking's longtime core business is hauling residuals—the stuff nobody wants, like the waste products that a sawmill produces while making lumber. Hines has a handle on all of it within a 150-mile radius of Prescott, companies that turn sawdust into particle board, bark into horticulture products, chips into paper, and shavings into chicken house bedding.

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Hines with (L-R) **Bruce Olney**, Operations/Safety Manager, **Wayne Morrow**, Maintenance Director, and **Wendell Hoover**, Controller

Hines is, of course, not alone in adhering to the wisdom that everything has a use and a value to someone. The story is told, for example, of the late trucking magnate J.B. Hunt showing up at a local sale barn one Saturday. The proprietor walked up to him after a bit, commenting to Hunt that he would be happy to suggest a few cows to buy. "Heck," said Hunt. "I'm not here to buy cattle. You can't make any money doing that. I want to take all this manure off your hands."

In the early 1990s, Hines says it dawned on him that there must be profit from the huge piles of log yard waste that were piling up behind sawmills in Southwest Arkansas. Mills weren't allowed to burn the waste. Now, they weren't disappointed if those piles of rubble spontaneously combusted. However, the mill's owners knew the Environmental Protection Agency wasn't going to allow these huge fire hazards to continue to exist unattended.

Hines knew that demand was rising for sawdust as boiler fuel at logging companies. Determined to figure out how to reclaim the waste, Hines contacted a Seattle inventor who had built a stationary system that would separate the usable sawdust from the rest. He asked if a portable system could be built.

The inventor responded that it was possible and Hines brought it back to Arkansas and transported it from

site to site until giving it a permanent home at his headquarters. He also has a 1,000-horsepower portable grinding machine for logs rejected because of embedded metal. The division, Hines Wood Fiber Recovery and Processing, makes money from the logging operations who pay to have their waste hauled off, and from companies that pay for the product. Plus, it's a neat idea. "I enjoy making un-useful things useful," he said. "I look at it as both a challenge and an opportunity."

It's probably not a business model his father, J.D. Hines, envisioned when he bought his first logging truck in 1936. J.D. had grown up in a family of loggers and sawmill operators, lost his own father as a teenager, and started driving as soon as he was old enough.

As a business owner, the elder Hines let his crew take care of the cutting and

**"CHANGE DOES NOT BOTHER ME...
IF IT'S CHANGE FOR THE GOOD."**

loading while he did all the driving, and sometimes he took his son along with him on the hauls. When the logging industry slowed in the 1950s, he installed a five-yard dump box on the truck and hauled gravel until business picked up

and he could return to his first love, the woods.

However, his temporary decision to haul rocks proved to be more lucrative than hauling trees, so J.D. dropped the logging operation and hauled only gravel and aggregate, much of it on state government contracts. He owned only three trucks and three trailer dumps. A cautious businessman, he was content to leave it at that. "He didn't want more than three trucks," Billy Hines said. "He said if he could have made a living and fed the family and taken care of them, he'd have done it with one truck, but he had to have three trucks to live the way they wanted to live."

A father's advice

When the younger Hines graduated high school, J.D. insisted that his son attend college like his older sister, who went on to write books on etiquette. Hines gave it a try but college wasn't right for him at the time and he soon returned home asking for a job, setting up the classic father-son head-butting contest in which J.D. refused to hire his son and insisted he return to school while Hines refused to go to school and insisted he wanted to work.

In this case, the son proved to be more persistent than his father. After Hines spent a couple of years working odd jobs around town, J.D. relented and hired him as a driver. "When he realized that I wasn't going to go back to school, he put me to work," Hines said.

Within a year or so, Billy Hines had bought his own truck, and soon would buy two more. He and his father owned six trucks operating as separate companies but working as partners on the same jobs. Though he loved driving, Billy Hines eventually found himself wanting to work on the trucks more than to drive them. He enjoyed that role, too, though it could be challenging. One job took his trucks five miles over one of the nicest

gravel roads he had ever seen at an old World War II munitions testing facility in Hempstead County. Unbeknownst to him, that gravel road was littered with shrapnel that embedded itself in the tires and slowly worked its way to the tubes. One day he fixed 22 flats. The next day, it was 36. The day after that it was 25. And then, 83 flats and three days later, "the job was finally over, thank goodness," he said, smiling.

J.D. and Billy Hines worked as partners until 1976, when they decided to incorporate and merge, an arrangement that lasted until 1984, when Hines bought his father's shares and became president and chief executive officer of the company.

His father died two years later. Reflecting on their relationship, Hines believes his father was more cautious while he, the son, was more of a risk taker. True to many father-son relationships, Hines credits his father with the skills he uses today. "My dad was an excellent manager of people and finances," he said. "He taught me how to go out and meet and greet potential customers. He taught and instilled in me an excellent work ethic. He taught me to

put the Lord first, that the Lord would help you tend to your business and guide you along if you just listen."

Taking the helm

When Hines bought controlling interest in the company, he was already making strides to expand its opportunities and customer base. In 1979, he landed a local chip haul contract with a mill operated by Edward Hines Lumber Company – no relation to the family. He was paid by the ton, not the mile, so the more payload he could haul legally and safely, the more money his company made.

Hines has always searched for ways to increase his payload safely. While the trucking industry continues to toy with the idea of single tires, Hines bought them back in 1989. Hines recalls that drivers were skittish at first, but with a little training grew accustomed to the change. However, when a truck had a flat, it had to stop.

To compensate, Hines set up vendors every 50 miles along the company's routes. He continues the arrangement to this day and it works well, even though

Hines says he always gets a few questions. "It has paid major, major dividends," Hines said. "And I'll run into somebody and get introduced to them and say that I own Hines Trucking, and they say, 'Oh, you're the guy running around with the single tires.'"

It was a gutsy decision and, at the time, an unusual way of doing business, but Hines would prove to be adept at taking risks. "Change does not bother me if it's change for the good," he said, adding, "and I like a challenge."

Meanwhile, Hines was expanding into other areas. In 1984, he bought flat-bed trailers and trucks and started hauling lumber and building products over a four-state region, a market that later expanded to all 48 continental states. Two years later, he bought refrigerator trailers and expanded nationwide into that business, and in 1989 he bought dry vans and added that to his long haul operation.

Then in 1990, he sold the long haul division because it was a good business opportunity and focused on hauling only residuals and building up his recovery division. He recently began hauling

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logs, as his father did, for International Paper, Weyerhaeuser, and other mills. At about the same time, he started a flatbed division hauling building products that operates in the southeast quarter of the United States.

Like other trucking companies, Hines Trucking faces a variety of challenges right now, including rising fuel costs, a driver shortage, and a slowdown in the building industry caused by, among other factors, the mortgage lending crisis. Like other executives, Hines deals with each of them creatively when he can.

To save on fuel, he's always on the lookout for technological innovations, and he provides incentives for drivers to be fuel-efficient. To deal with the driver shortage, he has tried to create a family-friendly business model that caters to drivers. Residual haulers are home every day, and he has limited his flatbed division to the southeastern quarter of the United States in large part for the sake of his drivers.

"If the driver wants to be home every weekend, he's home every weekend," he said. "And working in that area, you can get them home every weekend. If I stretch out further, I can't guarantee they're going to be home."

Hines maintains that the causes of the driver shortage may rest with the culture within many trucking companies. "Until the industry realizes that truck drivers do have a life and do want a life, we're going to continue to lose truck drivers from this industry. They're going to do something else. I told my operations manager a while ago that I sometimes feel like our customers think we're a vending machine, and just whatever today's whim is, is the button they push on that vending machine."

Hines admits that letting shippers call the shots can be an easy trap, one that his company followed for many years. Although he now is enjoying some success balancing the scales, it's still a constant battle to be treated as an equal partner.

He pauses when asked why trucking company owners fail to stand up against their customers a little more often. "The easiest thing to say would be that any-

body can get in this business," he said. "But I allowed it to happen some because we were so busy; we didn't have time to deal with it. We just did what they said and kept the trucks moving and kept trying to turn a profit. That can circle around sometimes and bite you."

Hines observes that the forest products industry is evolving and demanding that carriers adhere to strict safety standards, unlike in past years. "That's going to weed out a lot of the people that probably should have never been in the business to start with, as far as truckers and carriers go, and that's a good thing because safety should come first," observed Hines.

Meanwhile, the building products industry that forms the basis of his company's business is in a major downturn thanks to the nation's housing troubles. Half of his flatbed hauls are of building materials, and some of his mills are closing temporarily or even permanently. "I have mills that normally produce 24

hours a day, five to seven days a week, and they're currently 12 hours a day, four to five days a week," he said.

Hines Trucking has been able to weather the storm because of its flexibility and diverse customer base. It doesn't put him out of business if a mill lowers its expectations from 100 hauls a week to 50. Meanwhile, his company is ready if a mill needs a dependable, safe, structured carrier. When a Weyerhaeuser paper mill in Southeast Oklahoma lost two of its nearby suppliers, Hines Trucking was ready to haul chips from 200 miles away. And when residual haulers in Louisiana turn their noses up at hauling in Arkansas because of tougher Department of Transportation enforcement, or if a rail stops hauling residuals, as happened in East Texas, he's ready to step in.

No matter what happens, experience has shown him that good times follow difficult times. "I've seen it cycle before," he said.

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Hines on-site with two of his restored classic cars.

Taking a break

It's hard to imagine any industry that would put more gray hairs on an executive's head than trucking. Unlike nine-to-five offices, the company operates 24 hours a day and depends on far-flung employees making independent, million-dollar decisions. Yet Hines seems relaxed during a morning-long interview and photo session.

Part of that is because, after almost four decades in the business, he knows his company is successful and in good hands. Thanks to his senior management team—Operations/Safety Manager Bruce Olney, Controller Wendell Hoover, and Director of Maintenance Wayne Morrow—he knows he doesn't have to live at the office as he did when he was building the company. "I have three excellent managers, and as long as we communicate, as long as they're able to communicate with me and vice versa, they can run the company," he said. "They absolutely can run the company."

Meanwhile, he has a relaxing hobby that takes his mind off his business—restoring classic cars. He has about 25 antiques, including his favorite, a 1970 Boss 29 Mustang, and his oldest, a 1926 Mack truck that hasn't yet been restored. Part of his headquarters looks like an

auto museum. He doesn't mind showing off a gorgeous white 1957 Thunderbird or explaining how to operate an antique 10-gallon gas tank. He's even made a little money off of his hobby, but the real joy is in getting lost under the hood—once for 12 hours—and in making something un-useful useful again, just as he does in business. Plus, he loves taking one of those restored old cars on a drive.

Priorities

Finally he has one more reason to relax. Hanging behind his desk is a crayon drawing featuring a little girl and the words, "I love you, Dad." Nine years ago, Hines' wife, Vickie, gave birth to their daughter, Hannah. Now 59, Hines already had three children of his own—his oldest, Kiley, 37, works in the company's recruiting department—and two stepchildren, and one would think that he would have been content to reach the parenting finish line and focus on grandkids and fishing. "But things change—empty nest," he explained with a shrug and a grin.

Little girls can change a dad's priorities. Now he's able to enjoy fatherhood in a way that wasn't possible when he was building a business. What about changing Hannah's diapers? He did it. "It was

something I did that I didn't have to do with the other three because I was always too busy," he said.

He spends much more time with his family these days without apologies to his business, a rule that many could follow. Hines says that he might work four days a week and take off the fifth to be with his family while he never would have done that a few years ago. He moved to Texarkana a couple of years ago so that Hannah could attend a private school and he takes her every morning. The family owns a motor home and travels quite a bit—often to the East Coast to visit a daughter.

A couple of days after our interview, he planned to drive Vickie and Hannah to Florida to spend a week at their home near the beach and "basically do nothing," he predicted.

It's a far cry from the life he led for so many years building a business, making un-useful things useful, and he wouldn't have it any other way. "It was 24-7. The only break I took was to go to church. And missed a few of those," he said. "But the Lord has blessed this company and the Lord has blessed me and my family. Without Him, the success wouldn't be here. It absolutely would not be here."



AT A GLANCE

BORN: September 3, 1948

EDUCATION: Graduated Prescott High in 1966

FIRST CAR: 64 Ford Galaxy 500

FIRST JOB: Mowing lawns

BEST ADVICE HE RECALLS FROM HIS DAD: Keep your bills paid up.

FAVORITE COURSE IN SCHOOL: History

FAVORITE HOME COOKED MEAL: Pot roast

FOOD YOU WON'T EAT, NO MATTER WHAT: Not many. Brussels sprouts, beets. Beets taste like dirt to me.

FAVORITE DESSERT: Real homemade vanilla ice cream.

BEST PART ABOUT OWNING A BUSINESS: I guess the accountability. I know that sounds crazy.

WORST PART ABOUT OWNING A BUSINESS WITH YOUR NAME ON THE DOOR: The same thing. Because it goes both ways.

FAVORITE VACATION DESTINATION: Panama City Beach where I have a home.

HARDEST PART ABOUT BEING A DAD IN YOUR FIFTIES: Patience

BEST PART ABOUT BEING A DAD IN YOUR FIFTIES: The time I have to spend with Hannah.

PET NAME FOR YOUR DAUGHTER: I call her Hannah most of the time. ...I call her Scooter. Don't know why. I guess she's always scooting around.

