

TRANSPORTATION

feature

HINES TRUCKING CORPORATED

Safety Starts Here

FIRE EXTINGUISHER INSIDE
SCOTT, ARK

PHOTO: BRUCE OLNEY

4 million miles

by: jennifer pencek

Walter "Big Mac" McGill always planned to be a mechanic, but life took him on a different path, one he has been traveling for more than 35 years. The 62-year-old reached a milestone many professional truck drivers can only dream of – 4 million safe-driving miles.

To put it in perspective, that is more than 160 times around the Earth following the equator.

"It means a lot to me and it makes me feel like I've done good, and I want to keep that going," says McGill, a truck driver since 1979 for J. D. and Billy Hines Trucking in Prescott, Ark. "I'd like to make another million miles."

In order to reach 4 million safe-driving miles, a driver must not be involved in any chargeable accidents. A driver could reach the milestone post-accident as long as it is

deemed unpreventable on the driver's part.

J. D. and Billy Hines Trucking has nine active drivers in its Million Mile Club and three that have more than 2 million safe-driving miles built up, but McGill is the first in the company's history to reach 4 million safe-driving miles.

"Reaching 4 million miles in itself requires years of sacrifice, dedication and resilience to the profession," says Bruce Olney, the company's operations and safety director. "Simple mathematics states a driver averaging 120,000 miles a year would require 33.3 years to reach this milestone. Mac, our first, accomplished this in just over 32 years and much more impressively."

Earlier this year Schneider National recognized the fourth driver in its history to reach the milestone, and that company has approximately 12,000 trucks running coast to coast. Olney says Hines Trucking - a much

smaller company - has 150 trucks running regionally in Arkansas, Louisiana and Texas primarily, so it is unlikely any of the other active drivers with safe miles racked up would reach the 4 million miles mark.

"The reason I feel it likely will not happen again is that it takes virtual perfection in performance, dedication and commitment to the career and employer," Olney explains. "The driver would have to start his or her career early in life, have minimal to no health issues throughout his or her career, possess impeccable work ethic, and be well-disciplined and vigilant in their actions."

To reward him for reaching the milestone, the trucking company gave McGill a weekend trip to Hot Springs, Ark. He also received a 2012 Freightliner Coronado, but the new truck is not a reward for reaching 4 million safe-driving miles.

"Despite our technology today, we have not been able to design a machine's components to outlast God's design of man," Olney says. "[McGill] does have input on above-normal amenities in specking out his replacement units, and we provide personal exterior graphics to recognize service and miles."

Along with reaching 4 million safe-driving miles, McGill has also been selected Driver of the Month and Driver of the Year numerous times. To be chosen, drivers must accrue the most points in various categories from attendance, safety points, load count and more. Any driver employed for at least 12 months has equal opportunity, regardless of seniority.

With all the accolades he has received over the years, one might think McGill is a trucking superstar. He certainly does not think of himself that way. While he is proud of himself for being such a diligent driver for decades, the praise he has received just proves to him that he made the right career choice all those years ago.

"I figured a long time ago that I chose the right career," he says. "I don't want to do anything else but drive a truck. I thought that 20 years ago."

McGill graduated from Blevins High School in Arkansas in 1967 and began working for Potlatch Lumber Co. in Prescott as a forklift driver. After leaving the company, he drove truck for Harris Trucking in Hope, Ark., and then worked as a delivery driver for Steven's Groceries in Blevins. He started with Hines Trucking in June 1979.

McGill has been married to his wife, Eloise, for 40 years, and they have two grown children and two grandchildren. He says he hopes to retire at 65, provided his health is good. Despite making company history, McGill does not consider himself special or different from his fellow drivers. He does

acknowledge, however, that reaching 4 million safe-driving miles takes a lot of years and common sense. As news reports swirl around the country about accidents involving professional truck drivers, McGill says drivers have to be alert while on the road and make safety their top priority.

"Making 4 million miles is not a big deal, but making it accident-free is what it's all about," he says. "You have to watch other drivers, especially four-wheelers, because most of them are inexperienced. You have to stay on your guard all the time, and you have to watch your front and back. The main thing is not to get distracted by anything."

He has had his fair share of close calls with drivers cutting him off on the road, but nothing stands out in his memory as the scariest. He says he credits safe driving with that accomplishment.

"I try to stay far enough back to not even get in that situation," he says. "I've had times when I've had to hit my brakes harder than I'd like, but nothing in particular stands out."

Something that does stand out is a few unplanned days he spent in Albany, N.Y., in the late 1980s.

"I remember I got in on a Friday afternoon in Albany, but it was too late to get loaded, so I had to stay Saturday and Sunday since the place didn't load on weekends," he

says. "Then there was a snowstorm Monday, so I didn't get to leave until Tuesday or Wednesday. I got to stay in a Best Western and watch a lot of TV and call my wife. It wasn't bad, but it's something I'll never forget."

McGill has driven through 48 states, but now drives regionally. That is just the way he likes it.

"I get to go home every night," he says.

Along with millions of safe-driving miles, McGill has also collected a network of true friends, ones that have an abundance of admiration for the man.

"Throughout life, we all meet individuals of high exception," Olney says. "Unfortunately, for the most part we fail to recognize them until they are no longer with us, leaving regrets for the unspoken. Walter 'Big Mac' McGill is that caliber of person and we have all benefited in some way from knowing him. He is a selfless, humble man, providing a life for his family and strongly contributing to the success of our company and its future. He has earned a milestone of the elite in our profession. He is a son, husband, father, grandfather and employee, but most of all, he is my friend."

Owner Billy Hines worked next to McGill until the company became too large for him to continue driving. Over the years, Hines has watched McGill and has been proud of

the driver he has become.

"Walter is an example of what you can accomplish when you are committed to your profession in a high level of integrity and work ethic," he says. "His peers recognize his accomplishment and respect what he sacrificed in reaching this milestone."

However, McGill is not the only reputable driver at the company. Hines says he is lucky to employ numerous drivers who possess the same positive qualities as McGill.

"Walter's achievement is extremely rare in our industry and he certainly deserves full recognition for this, but if you could measure and record the human quality, he would be in a crowd here at HTI."

Still, McGill is a role model. Darlene Wiley, driver manager for the company, says other drivers look up to McGill for more than how to drive safely. It is his hard-working attitude that earns him the most respect, she says.

"Despite his seniority with the company, he still believes that no task is beneath him and he is willing to do whatever is asked of him," she says. "Walter's humble personality, positive attitude and achievements have earned him respect within our company, as well as outside our company. We are ecstatic about his accomplishments and it is truly a pleasure to work/dispatch him every day." **PCM**