

East coast charm

By putting its employees and customers first, Atlantic Pacific Transport stands out from the rest

July 26, 2017 by Sonia Straface

CLAIRVILLE, N.B. — A little east coast charm goes a long way. In fact, for some, it's a way of doing business.

In the heart of Clairville, N.B. lies Atlantic Pacific Transport, a company that oozes charm out of each of its exhaust stacks. It's a small family-run business that claims to have an impeccable driver turnover rate, and a customer-service dedication that is hard to match.

The business was started by Donnie Fillmore Sr. in 1989 after he decided he had enough experience in the industry to start his own trucking business with a friend. Donnie Sr. had been driving for years, and even ran the show at someone else's company before taking the leap into ownership. Initially Donnie Sr. and his business partner split the company into equal parts but after a few years, Fillmore bought his partner out and Atlantic Pacific became his own.

Today, while Donnie Sr. still helps out with the business, it's officially run by his sons, president Donnie Jr. and vice-president Mark. The two brothers work together to make sure operations run smoothly and each load is delivered on time and with care.

Atlantic Pacific lives up to its name as it services Canada and the U.S. from coast to coast. It mainly transports building supplies and construction materials like drywall, lumber, coils, heavy equipment, and structural steel.



Donnie Fillmore Jr.

Put neatly, "We'll move anything that'll fit on a flatbed or float," Donnie Fillmore Jr. said.

The company has seen growth since its inception and now boasts close to 50 trucks and 90 trailers.

"We've been really fortunate here, as all of our trucks are full," Fillmore said. "We're in a good position today, even though there have been times when it was difficult."

Fillmore said that he believes his drivers are happy because of the good company image and culture that is bolstered by the fact it is one of just 17 carriers in the Maritimes named as one of the Trucking Human Resources Sector Council Atlantic's Employers of Choice.

To be recognized for the award, fleet owners must demonstrate the company is dedicated to responding to the needs of its employees.

“I think we’re a supportive management team and that we create a great place for our drivers and staff to work,” Fillmore said. “That’s our goal every day. To make sure our people are here because they want to be here.”

And it’s a give and take, Fillmore said. Because as much as Atlantic Pacific gives to its employees, they give back to the business. Fillmore said from the beginning, the business has focused on selling service and his employees live and breathe that belief.

“We all try to focus on the pain points of our customers and work our best to eliminate stress for our customers,” he said. “We want to make their transportation the easy part for them...because we look at our customers as partners. We always ask ourselves, how can we make this a better partnership for them? So that’s a big thing for us. Focusing on service. And uptime. And on-time delivery.”

Fillmore said there are many instances when his modest staff went above and beyond to deliver on this standard, but one that stuck out in particular was when a dispatcher delivered a load to a customer.

“It was the weekend, and we were in a pinch,” Fillmore recalled. “For some reason, our driver couldn’t deliver the load, and we didn’t want our customer to wait, so I actually had a dispatcher volunteer to deliver. He had his Class 1 and he said ‘I’ll do it’ and off he went. The load was delivered and the customer didn’t know any better.”

And while right now Fillmore has all the staff he needs, the driver issue is still looming like a dark cloud over an otherwise sunny day.

“Finding qualified drivers is still a big challenge,” he said. “Just because it’s not an issue right now for us, doesn’t mean it won’t be in the future.”

What he’s most concerned about right now though, is the ongoing discussion about marijuana legalization in Canada.

“How we’re going to deal with marijuana legalization is going to be a big challenge next year,” he said. “Right now, we have policies in place, and we do drug testing like everyone else, but I can’t help but think about how is this going to affect us when we have a driver who wants to consume marijuana on the weekend and works as a driver during the week?”

Where’s the impairment level going to rest? I think it’s going to be a big hurdle for the trucking industry.”

Looking towards the future, like many business owners, Fillmore hopes Atlantic Pacific can grow steadily and expand its service capabilities.

“We hope in the next five to 10 years, we can grow and with that, make our business stronger,” he said. “We hope in our growth that we can better serve our customers and serve new customers by diversifying a bit, and maybe working to serve different industries and helping more businesses out. We’d love to look at that.”

Being a family business, Fillmore did say the possibility of him handing over the reins to his children is an option in the future. It's a career path he said he wouldn't advise against, as trucking has served him well since he joined the business in 1993.

"I have children, so the possibility of the family business being run by the third generation is possible," he said. "I have one that seems interested in joining though she's still quite young. So, we'll wait and see. Time will tell. It wasn't on my radar when I was young but 24 years later I'm still here. It's been a great career and a great industry to me. I know quite a few faces across the country because of my job and some of the brightest and most inspirational people I know are in trucking. It's been great to me, so if my kids join the business, I hope only the same for them.