

MARCH/APRIL 2014

# RoadKing

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Nancy Spelsberg,  
owner of BCP  
Transportation

## GOING HER WAY

ONE WOMAN'S  
APPROACH TO  
THE TRUCKING  
BUSINESS

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COVER FEATURE

# Going Her Way

BY ANNEMARIE MANNION

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## Nancy Spelsberg believes her company's drivers should make money and have fun

**N**ancy Spelsberg never planned to run a trucking company.

She worked in logistics and distribution for a major utility, but always dreamed of having her own business. So about three years ago, she mailed letters to 70

small companies with owners who appeared to be about the age that they might consider selling.

When she heard back from Badger Custom Pallet, a pallet manufacturing company that had its own private carrier, Spelsberg was intrigued. But instead of going into the pallet-making business she and Todd Jourdan, BCP vice president, decided to buy the private carrier. They have expanded it into BCP Transportation, which now delivers far more than pallets. Freight goes out to 48 states and includes printing materials, rolls of cotton and more.

"We decided to spin off the trucking piece and grow it from there," Spelsberg says.

Grow, it has. In May 2011, BCP had four trucks. Today, it has 75 trucks and 150 trailers, and earned a Rising Star award in 2013 from the Wisconsin Economic Development Corp.

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Spelsberg with driver Marisol Roman, a 4'11" powerhouse who was one of the early hires.



### Working with drivers

The company's expansion can be tied to Spelsberg's efforts to foster positive relationships with owner-operators and employees. Twenty-seven of its trucks are owner-operated. Two

rates to male drivers who had less experience than she did. "Isn't that a back stab?" she says. Harry Horton, an owner-operator who has worked with BCP since August 2011, also appreciates the straightforward way

### WHEEL WOMEN

"Until a few years ago, women often chose to drive and to do their job without calling attention to themselves. They just wanted to be left alone so they weren't noticed. That has changed. Women are much more

likely to be visible and prove their capability. This is important because we need to show the non-trucking public that women can and do drive trucks! We honor them at MATS each year because they still represent a small part of the driver population and



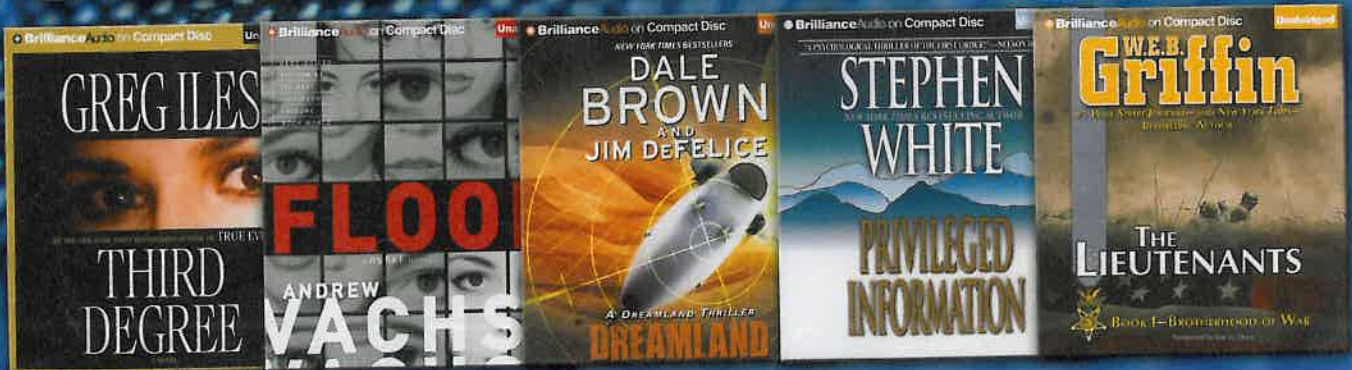
Ellen Voie

I consider them to be pioneers and role models. The Salute to Women Behind the Wheel is to remind them of that and how much we appreciate and admire what they do." - Ellen Voie, President and CEO of Women In Trucking

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## WHEEL WOMEN

"Women are only about 5 percent of the over-the-road driving force in America. Most women never even consider driving a big rig. Although traditionally we are the moms, the caregivers, wives and full-time job holders, women who have

grown up with or married into trucking are the most likely to consider driving professionally. Today's trucking community overall considers women 'almost' equal with their male counterparts, which is a huge difference than when the first women sat behind the wheel decades



Marge Bailey

ago. Unfortunately, a great number of women drivers report that they have a long road ahead of them to attain the recognition women deserve and have earned as professional drivers over the last 50 years." - Marge Bailey, founder and CEO/LadyTruckDrivers.com

that the company deals with drivers. Horton keeps close track of his numbers and says that at previous jobs, if he pointed out a discrepancy, he had to stay on top of the process and spend time chasing his money.

"Here, there have been a couple of times in two years where they didn't get some paperwork when I hauled a load that someone else delivered," says Horton, noting that the issue was corrected when BCP received the late paperwork.

When it comes to money and company earnings, Spelsberg keeps drivers in the loop. She goes over the numbers with owner-operators each quarter.

"She breaks everything down on a revenue basis," says Jourdan. "We get down to the nitty-gritty and give owner-operators the real numbers."

## Everybody profits

Spelsberg keeps a diverse customer base, with about 20 to 25 clients accounting for most of BCP's business. The largest customer makes up about 13 percent of the business. "The more customers you have, the more you can ride the

ebbs and flows," she explains.

The company also keeps brokers' fees in check. All of its outbound deliveries are customer direct and about 65 percent of backhaul is customer direct.

"Brokers have to make money, too," Spelsberg says. "But, to the extent we can, we cut out the middle man."

To increase fuel efficiency for both company and owner-operated vehicles the company has installed side skirts and trailer tails on its trailers. The skirts cost \$1,200 each; the tails are \$1,600.

Jourdan says those modifications save owner-operators about \$10,000 a year in fuel.

"They've put them on the trailers and I get the benefit of that fuel savings," Horton says. "They didn't charge me for that. It makes a big difference to me."

BCP also splits fuel surcharges with owner-operators and works to ensure they, like company drivers, get to transport higher paying loads. "Sometimes owner-operators get nickel and dime," Spelsberg says. "They pay fees, they get lesser paying loads than company trucks. We don't do that."

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Drivers appreciate that Spelsberg pays attention to their concerns.



### Woman's work?

If anyone reacts with surprise when Spelsberg tells them she's in trucking, it's usually someone outside the industry.

"They can't fathom in their minds that there's a woman who runs a trucking company," she says. "They say, 'Oh. Are you the office girl?' Or they think I'm a figurehead."

She recently joined the organization Women in Trucking to play a part in changing that. She wants to promote and recruit women to the field, noting the still low percentage of women drivers. But she also believes that women can make an impact in other areas connected to trucking, as she has done with her

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company. "I think women have emotion and compassion in their collective lives and use this to drive personal achievement and inspire others to follow," she says.

Some would say Spelsberg serves as the perfect example of that theory in action. For example, she noticed a while back that one owner-operator for the company was not hitting his numbers and was concerned. Then, by chance, she saw him bobtailing on the highway one evening. Back at work, she asked him about that. Where was he going? He told her that he was driving to northern Wisconsin every night so that he could be home with his family. She immediately changed his route to focus on deliveries near his house.

The goal is always to work as a team and to find ways to enjoy the workday. BCP holds such events as Spirit Week, when employees can sport unique hair styles on Crazy Hair Day. Even callers can get in on the fun by pushing a button on the company voicemail to hear a duck quacking. "It's literally just a duck quacking," says Spelsberg. "People ask us why we have that. I say, 'Because we can.'" Spelsberg wants her staff to work hard, have fun and be positive. Horton says she's meeting that goal.

"If you talk to them on the phone you can hear the fun they're having. They're a good bunch," he says.

More importantly, he and Roman both say they are earning a good living.

"I haven't had a bad quarter," Horton says. "I'm making more money than I ever have." ☺