

All in the Family



At Massachusetts Carrier, New Approach Generates Savings

Whoever coined the phrase “Youth is wasted on the young” never met the Normandin family. In the teeth of the Great Recession, they are building the business with a combination of new technology and talent.

That strategy has paid off for the husband-and-wife team of Cindy and David Normandin, and their Massachusetts-based companies—Braun’s Express and Normandin Transportation Systems (NTS). Over the past five years, the firms have grown through the acquisition of businesses, equipment, talent and ideas.

Case in point: In 2012, Braun’s Express increased the number of its locations from five to eight. Braun’s President, David Normandin, expanded his company’s operations to the Midwest and moved to a new facility in Maryland. The company now operates in Hopedale, Mass., Syracuse, N.Y., Cranbury, N. J., Elkridge, Md., Dalton, Ga., Bolingbrook, Ill., Eagan, Minn., and Milwaukee, Wisc.

In 2008, Cindy Normandin started her own trucking company, Normandin

Transportation Services (NTS), achieved national certification as a woman-owned business and developed her company right along with Braun’s.

Along the way, both companies have invested in new equipment from Mack Trucks, boosting the size of the combined fleet to 190 power units.

Next-Generation Talent

Braun’s Express is an LTL carrier specializing in carpet and flooring, providing complete supply-chain logistics services. NTS does point-to-point truckload hauling. The companies have managed to increase their combined fuel efficiency by more than a mile a gallon, thanks to contributions from two of the newest members of the team—son Stephen Normandin and son-in-law Matthew Cann.

“They’re helping us with a new way of doing things, such as the EPA’s SmartWay partnership,” Cindy said of the pair of 27-year-olds. “We will do everything we can to green our trucks. Most of it involves MPG savings, which includes spec’ing the trucks to get the best fuel economy. Stephen has an engineering background. He researched the idle-free auxiliary power units (APUs) that we’ve had in our sleeper

trucks for many years. He just recently began testing a new option. We now have test trucks with solar panels to boost the run time of the systems.”

Real Drivers Don’t Idle

Tweaking an APU may not sound like a big deal until you park your rig for hours in sunny Georgia, the carpet capital of America and a major freight origin for the companies. An APU supplies heating and air conditioning to the cab when the truck isn’t running. They provide an alternative to idling the rig, which boosts costs through increased fuel consumption. APUs charge a dedicated battery bank using the truck’s alternator and provide up to 10 hours of cooling time when the truck would typically idle. But since Georgia’s heat cut cooling time to 6–7 hours, Stephen had solar panels installed to boost auxiliary power.

Mack was the first truck manufacturer to offer the Idle-Free Hybrid System, a solution it launched as an option in 2007.

Even without solar power, the units saved on fuel costs. During the test phase, Mack trucks with non-idling cooling units ran an average of 6.75 mpg while those without averaged 5.87 mpg. Stephen estimates APUs in 40 of the company’s

sleeper trucks will pay for themselves in less than a year.

The Age of Innovation

Innovation isn't limited to the younger generation. The folks with a few more miles on the odometer are also breaking new ground.

In 2008, as the Great Recession hit the trucking industry, Cindy found an opportunity to help a friend and build a business. She bought an existing company, renamed it Normandin Transportation Services and achieved national certification as a woman-owned business. Since then she's expanded into new markets, landed a Fortune 500 customer and grown the fleet from five to 65 trucks.

While the Fortune 500 company supported diversity, it was Mack Trucks and sales rep Jim Lavoie at Ballard Mack in Worcester, Mass., who supported her company. NTS responded in kind. Within the past eight months the company has purchased seven new Mack® Pinnacle™ tractors with 445 hp MP8 engines, 9-speed transmissions, 70-inch midrise sleepers and APUs.

Braun's Express bought another six Pinnacle day cab models, bringing the combined fleet to 190 power units.

"The drivers say they're great," Cindy said of the new Pinnacle models. "The interiors are comfortable and the trucks have a lot of power."

Fuel for Thought


Fuel efficiency is a constant focus for companies in the SmartWay program. The

Normandins' trucks feature aerodynamic mirrors, front bumpers and fairings, with super single tires on the back, as well as APU systems.

"The trucks are still in the break-in period but they're doing very well," Cindy said. "We generate weekly reports and post them at every terminal with the drivers' MPG rankings. The drivers all look to see where they are on the ranking. At NTS, our fleet is mostly sleepers, and we have quite a few people above 6.5 mpg. The highest this week was 6.95 mpg. On the Braun's Express side, we have day cabs getting as high as 8.35 mpg."

She has equal praise for the people behind the equipment, including a 113-year-old Bulldog.

"Ballard Mack in Worcester has been a partner, helping us to spec our new trucks," Cindy said. "We'll talk about what the drivers like and don't like. Jim Lavoie tells us about the options and what he'd recommend. We have Mack OneCall™ CompleteCare emergency road assistance support. We also use Mack Financial at times. They're always there for us. We work on preventive maintenance, so we usually don't have problems. But when we do have issues, the owner of Ballard Mack comes to the table and tries to resolve the issue. He gets the whole Mack corporation involved. They're available. They communicate. They get on it right away. That's what you want from customer service. You feel they're a real partner."

That's the kind of innovation that knows no boundaries—not even age. 

Fuel-Saving Tips from Braun's Express

For Cindy and Dave Normandin, going green has become a mission, one they hope will reshape their industry.

The carrier started its own environmental movement in 2004 by joining the EPA's SmartWay program. That passion for efficiency has saved the company thousands of dollars, led to safer driving practices and gained statewide recognition: Braun's Express was named a Massachusetts Energy Leader by the commonwealth's Department of Energy Resources.

In addition to using idle-free auxiliary power units and running with wide-base tires, Braun's Express has adopted a fleet of fuel-saving initiatives, including:

- **Idle reduction technology.** Short-haul truck engines shut down after idling for three minutes. Long-haul trucks sport auxiliary power units that save about 1,000 gallons of fuel per truck per year.
- **Speed limitations.** Braun's Express has Mack program speed limits for each truck: 65 mph for short-haul and 68 mph for long-haul trucks.
- **Monitoring systems.** Onboard modules record sudden starts and stops as well as idling time and speed. Drivers who exceed speed limits are notified to slow down.
- **Tire technology.** Wide-base tires allow for heavier payloads and reduce fuel consumption by 4–10 percent; automatic tire inflation systems trim fuel costs by another 3 percent.
- **Gear ratio.** On its last two truck orders, the company dropped the rear axle ratio from 3.86 to 3.55. The company also has tweaked engine settings to lower the RPMs at higher speeds.
- **Education and behavior.** Management researches new technologies and conducts small-scale tests. It's also rolling out a program to educate drivers on maximizing fuel efficiency. By giving a miles-per-gallon score to every driver, the company encourages competition while explaining how fuel savings help its bottom line.



From left, Stephen, David and Cindy Normandin, with Matthew Cann