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Trucking company to celebrate 30 years in Cartersville

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7 Hills Transport has been in Cartersville for nearly 30 years, a milestone they will soon celebrate.

It might seem pointless to some to recognize something as intangible as a length of time. It will be, after all, another day at the office. But then again, founder and CEO Lyons Heyman said the truckload carrier company celebrates a lot of things.

“We reward safe behavior,” he said. “We reward longevity. We reward anniversaries. We reward Christmas. We reward the number of miles that they run.”

And by “they,” he means truck drivers, the heart and soul of 7 Hills’



SKIP BUTLER/The Daily Tribune News Parts Manager Chris Owens, right, talks with Charles Williams, 7 Hills Transport's most senior mechanic.

operational existence. Each one of those miles they drive is tracked on software called CarrierWeb, monitored by a team of employees stationed on the second floor of the building. It is the same building where Heyman sits in a corner office one story beneath and watches fleets of trucks enter and leave the property daily while handling all other various aspects of his business.

It didn't always look like this, though. To understand how a company survives 30 years — a length of time which is, Heyman notes, greater than many marriages — it takes some knowledge of history.

It was the year 1981. A young Lyons Heyman had just received a graduate degree from the University of North Carolina and was ready to tackle the business world head-on.

Great, he thought. But how?

He had banking experience but knew that was not what he wanted to do long-term. His family had owned a furniture business in Rome where he had worked for three to four years but they eventually ended up selling it. With a shiny new degree in hand but no clear-cut direction in which to take his skills and education, Heyman took a job with a contract freight carrier who had previously done business with his family's company.

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UPDATE: A local man was found deceased this morning in the parking lot of Woodright Industries on Highway 17, according to Bartow County Sheriff's Office Lt. Robert Moultrie. The victim had been shot multiple times in the torso, and possibly in the leg. The man was in his mid-30s; the name is not being released pending notification of next of kin. Moultrie said time of death appears to be between 3:45 and 6 a.m.

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While he was there, he noticed one specific thing about the industry.

“You could do all this work for labor, material and overhead and all that stuff, and then, at the end of the product line, you got this vehicle.

You got this sellable item,” Heyman said.

And that sellable item was what fascinated Heyman. What, he thought, could he do in this business? It was a good thought to have,

particularly because, one year earlier, then-president Jimmy Carter had signed the Motor Carrier Act of 1980 into law. The act largely deregulated the trucking industry and knocked down barriers that had once made it difficult for freight carriers to operate freely. Heyman

knew he was moving in to the right market at the right time.

He opened 7 Hills Transport in Rome in May 1981. After a few months, the business was already expanding and Heyman needed help. Through a mutual friend, he met Don Moore, an experienced operator with years in the carpet industry to his name. Moore met Heyman for lunch one day and joined 7 Hills shortly afterward in 1982.

“January the 2nd,” he recalled, sitting across from Heyman in the aforementioned corner office. Moore now holds the title of executive vice president.

The company moved to Cartersville in 1986, where it has been ever since. So how has 7 Hills remained here for so long? Heyman points to three things for the success of his company: the uniqueness of its operations, the quality of its employees and the support of the local community.

As for the first of those, Heyman said that, while 7 Hills is technically a truckload carrier, it is dynamic in that it offers services beyond what a comparable carrier might offer.

“You have truckload or you have less than truckload,” he explained.

“We’re a bit of a hybrid. That’s one of the things that makes us unique.”

What he means is that, instead of carrying freight from one big warehouse to another, 7 Hills runs a smaller fleet of trucks locally to fulfill less demanding orders, mainly from carpet mills. Once it is all collected, it is placed onto what is called a line haul truck — the large

cargo carriers typically seen on interstate highways. The line haul truck typically takes the freight to one of 7 Hills' warehouses in Texas, Louisiana or California, its three largest markets, where it is distributed to the correct locations by local trucks there. By doing this, Heyman said, large and small orders alike are fulfilled.

The second characteristic of 7 Hills Heyman attributed to its success was the quality of the people. With the large amount of work that undoubtedly goes into the lifestyle of being a truck driver, why would people want to be employed by a truckload carrier? That's the question leadership at 7 Hills must continually ask to stay on top of their game.

"Drivers," said Moore, when asked what the biggest challenge facing the industry is. "You'll probably see now, and probably in years to come, it's the drivers coming into the marketplace. There won't be as many, I think, as there has been in years past."

Heyman noted that, in response to the conundrum of a dried-up driver market, 7 Hills plans to deliver.

"But we're attacking that a lot of different ways," he added to Moore's point. "We are instituting now ... the largest over-the-road driver pay increase in our history. We have decided that that's not going to be a limiting factor. We're going to pay. We're going to get these good quality drivers in here."

Though challenges of a changing market loom, the third key to 7 Hills' success remains a constant. It's Cartersville.

"It's just a great community," Heyman said of the place his business has continued to grow for nearly three decades.

Originally, Moore pointed out, Cartersville was chosen for its location — a midpoint between the carpet hub of Dalton and the transportation giant of Atlanta. But soon it became apparent: as money flowed in from 7 Hills' operations both locally and from other states, Cartersville and Bartow County returned the favor.

"We are really proud of the fact that we've been in this community," Heyman said. "We do things to support the community, but mainly, we get supported by this community. There's a lot of vendors that we

depend on here that provide anything from uniforms, to glass repairs, to maintenance, to fuel, insurance, medical insurance, that all come from this local community. We're proud of that."

And that allows the people involved with 7 Hills to be proud of what they do. As Heyman pulled out his cellphone to read a text message he said he unexpectedly received from a driver earlier that morning, the tone was clear.

"Would like to say thank you for the raise. Also for giving me the chance to do the best job I can."

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