



## Log Hauling is in the Family Blood

**Williams-Ford family restores their family business after the recession**

*By Andrea Watts*

The trucks may bear the name R&D Williams Log Hauling, but Ron “Rooster” Ford will attest that his company owes its success to more than just the time and capital that he and his wife, Debi, invested into the business.

When faced with the challenge of rebuilding his log hauling company, Ron turned to long-time friends who readily volunteered the much-needed loans and equipment. They are friendships that will bring tears to your eyes, Ron says of the relationships he has built over the years. And because these friendships now envelope his granddaughter, Mariah Ford, R&D Williams Log Hauling will see the next generation out in the woods.

### **Three Decades Strong**

For nearly 30 years, Ron has hauled logs throughout the Terrebonne, Ore., area that is his home base and north into Longview, Wash. Looking back, there is no question in his mind of his life-long profession.

“I always wanted to be a log hauler, and I always wanted to have my name on the door,” Ron says, “I always wanted to be my own boss.”

Ron worked for hire for several years before starting his business in 1984 and putting his name on the door. “Big companies were always hiring the independents, and I got a few contacts from working for other people. When I started my own business, I just called around to see if anyone needed a truck, and it all sparked and went crazy from there.”

Ron did the hauling while Debi handled the administration of the business—all while being a full-time school teacher with Deschutes County and raising four sons. She also served as secretary and treasurer of the Northwest Oregon Log Trucker Board (NOLTB), of which Ron was the president, before it closed in 2009. “[Debi] not only put money into the business, she also put an awful amount of time, and that’s why it’s R & D,” Ron says.

### **Recession and Tragedy Strike**

What the industry threw at R&D Williams Log Hauling was the 2008 recession. The lack of work forced Ron to park his truck in January 2009, and seven months later, he had a stroke. The medical bills resulted in their declaring bankruptcy and losing the business. Ron persevered through rehabilitation, becoming strong enough to return to log hauling. When Debi asked him why, Ron replied, “Why it’s in my blood, honey.”

Ron credits several friends for helping him rebuild his business. Sonny Myrick “was very instrumental in starting my business back up by allowing me to make payments on a 1966 Kenworth.” Don Rarden, who promised to help Ron restart his business if he ever decided to, paid for Ron’s licensing, insurance, and other equipment, and Ron is proud to say that he paid his friend back within the year. Rebuilding the interior of the Kenworth and headliner was the contribution of Chuck Ackermah, of Pineville, Ore. Don Peterkin whose friendship spans 30 years, loaned money to buy a trailer and electric scale package. The result was a well set-up Kenworth with a Cat loader and plenty of power. It’s a really nice old ride, Ron says, and Mariah adds that they “get lots of compliments on it.”



Yet when someone radios the Kenworth, it's not the "Rooster" who responds. Instead, it's the "Princess" who answers the call. "I decided to do something different, and I went on a ride-along with my grandpa," Mariah says, "and I've been hooked the second he put me behind the wheel."

Mariah was only 23 years old when she climbed behind that wheel as a big rig driver. After a year of getting up at 3:30 a.m., she still finds herself asking, "What in the world makes me do this?" but she's not about to quit. Mariah can't be missed out on the job site, not with her pink hardhat and safety vest. She even admits that if she could, the Kenworth would be pink too.

With Mariah claiming the Kenworth, Ron found himself a 1986 Mac Superliner, purchased from Mike Reeves. "First Mac I ever drove," he says, and while he admits it's a funny looking truck, Ron doesn't have any complaints.

### **Back in Business**

They haul regularly for Longview-based Hadaller Logging and Woodland-based Chilton Logging. Mariah credits JSW Logging, owned by brothers Jered and Jace Rhoden and based less than 20 minutes from where Mariah and Ron live, with helping her become knowledgeable about the industry during that first summer she started hauling.

"I probably learned more from these two brothers than I did from anybody else so far, except from Grandpa," says Mariah.

Having seen the hauling side, Mariah sees potential for R&D Williams Log Hauling to expand into the woods. "My five-year plan is I would like to cut our own trees," she says.

And with other family members who can run equipment—Mariah's father Shane Ford worked with Tantardino Logging—the Williams-Ford family has the expertise to fulfill the vision.

Ron couldn't understand why his granddaughter would trade a manager job of an AT&T store for the life of a log hauler, but he says, "I couldn't be happier with how it turned out."

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