**CTP Profile**

**Bill Hartman**

**GNC Logistics**

Bill Hartman’s path to becoming a Certified Transportation Professional started at his kitchen table and included a stop in the funeral business before landing in his current job as private fleet operations manager of GNC Logistics, LLC.

Hartman credits his father, a truck driver himself, for his love of trucking. “I learned to drive trucks on the kitchen table asking my father how to back up, turn, shift, hook-up and anything else he could tell me as I played with my toy trucks.”

However, his love for trucking took a slight detour – into the funeral business. “I never planned to be in the transportation business in this capacity,” explains Hartman. His goal was to be a funeral director. In fact, he obtained his funeral director’s license (which he still carries). However that career path took an unexpected, if familiar, detour back to the lessons learned from his father.

“I came to GNC as a way to earn some extra money driving a truck until I figured out what I wanted to do,” recalls Hartman. One night while driving, he was asked to fill in as a dispatcher and the rest is history. “I rediscovered my love for trucks. I felt right at home – as if I had been in the business for my entire life.”

One discipline that he carried over from his days as a funeral director was his appreciation of continuing education and certification. So it was not a stretch for Hartman to pursue the CTP designation. “The certification brought to light the knowledge essential for running a private fleet. So much of that discipline is taken for granted as you work day to day and it’s easy to lose sight of the strategic role the private fleet plays in ensuring the success of the enterprise. The process of preparing and obtaining the CTP designation helped broaden my perspective and helped improve my total fleet management toolkit.”

The process of learning, growing and improving continues to this day. Hartman serves as vice chair of the NPTC safety committee and is active on the NPTC Annual Conference Planning Committee. He is a frequent presenter in NPTC programs events, including the upcoming Private Fleet Management Institute where he will showcase his passion for enhancing safety management.

“I value the contacts, information and a chance to be part of a fantastic, well-run and respected trade group,” he said. “I learn something new every time I participate. I never realized how true the old adage of reaping what you sow is until I became involved with NPTC. And giving back Is a small price to pay for everything I received from the Council.”

**About GNC**

GNC Logistics is the transportation subsidiary of General Nutrition Centers, the largest global specialty retailer of nutritional products; including vitamin, mineral, herbal and other specialty supplements and sports nutrition, diet and energy products. GNC has more than 4,800 retail locations throughout the United States (including more than 1,000 franchise and 1,200 outlets within Rite Aid locations) and franchise operations in 48 international markets.

To service its stores and provide support for its manufacturing group, GNC relies on its private fleet consisting of 98 power units, 129 refrigerated trailers and 135 drivers to deliver GNC products from one of their three manufacturing plants to the distribution centers located in Anderson (SC), Leetsdale (PA) and Phoenix and then to our company owned and franchise stores. The ubiquity of the GNC store footprint is a necessary strategy for customer convenience, yet it imposes a host of delivery demands on the driver force.

Hartman says the fleet is a key component of the company's success. “All of our U.S. locations require replenishment of stock at least once every two weeks,” says Hartman, “and our drivers are the critical front-line of customer service day in and day out. But jockeying our rigs in older strip malls, in the inner city and in shopping malls and then having to hump 25-50 cases per stop – often interacting with customers or potential customers on the way into the store – requires a different breed of driver.”

Theirs is an important and demanding role; GNC drivers are on the road 7-10 days at a time. They leave one of the company's three distribution centers with a truckload full of 1,800 to 2,000 cases of product. Each day they make five to seven stops. Much of the work involves building and maintaining good relationships with store managers, not just off-loading cases to the store, by ensuring the orders are accurate and properly stacked in the stores.

Hartman plays an active role in spec’ing his equipment even though it is all leased. “I know what works well in our operation and so I make sure our equipment comes with the right components – from the right powerplant to the right tire. Trade cycles for delivery equipment have been set at six years, while the over-the-road team equipment is flipped after just three – based on cost and lease considerations.

The fleet measures its customer service on “cycle time,” which means getting all deliveries to the stores within a seven-day window and on a consistent basis enabling the stores to grow sales and keep labor cost to a minimum. “The service provided by the fleet is second to none,” says Hartman. “We are an extension of the sales force whereas the drivers bring the product in at a manner where the associate can handle customers and the driver ensures the shipment is correct.”

Hartman also measures utilization by the number of miles per day per unit and is using his in-cab communications to better track out-of-route miles, time at each delivery and route optimization.

After each trip, drivers usually get four days off. A standard performance metric for drivers is the “500 Rule” — meaning 500 miles, 500 cases or a combination of both driven and/or delivered each day.

“Keeping the drivers happy on the road is a priority,” says Hartman. Although the tractors are typically sleeper cabs, the company offers to pay for motel rooms each night. “We want to make sure drivers are well rested and refreshed for the next day's workload.”

Scorecards for drivers are pretty simple and direct: Bring the cycle of deliveries at or under seven days for the truckload and keep customers happy. Drivers seem quite pleased with their jobs; just look at the 11-13% annual turnover, certainly below the national average for private fleets.

GNC understands the importance of transportation in providing a shopping experience that exceeds our customers' expectations. In fact, the company’s website counts “manufacturing, packaging and distributing top-of-the-line products,” a primary factor in providing an “in-store experience second to none: “Courteous and knowledgeable sales associates, meticulously and adequately stocked shelves, consumer-friendly educational materials and signage, and a satisfaction guarantee on your purchase… these are the factors that come together to create a valuable and positive shopping experience for each and every customer.”

**GNC History**

In 1935, David Shakarian realized his dream by establishing a little health food store, called Lackzoom, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Shakarian's first storefront was located at 418 Wood Street in downtown Pittsburgh. Lackzoom specialized in yogurt, a food that his father helped introduce in the United States, but also sold other healthy foods such as honey, grains and "healthy sandwiches."

Even though health food was thought to be a passing fad back then, people welcomed Shakarian's store. And, although his first day's receipts totaled only $35, he was able to go on to make enough money to open a second location six months later.

Disaster struck with the 1936 St. Patrick's Day flood, which wiped out both of Shakarian's stores. But he was able to reopen both locations and went on to own six Pittsburgh area stores within the next five years. The '60s decade saw many changes, and people began to embrace the concept of natural foods and better nutrition. Shakarian met the growing demand by opening stores in other states. In this process, he also changed the name of his chain to General Nutrition Centers.

As the store count continued to grow, GNC began producing its own vitamin and mineral supplements as well as foods, beverages and cosmetics. By the early 1980s, the number of GNC locations had grown to more than 1,000.

Although we lost our founder in 1984, GNC has steadfastly continued to expand upon Shakarian's dream. General Nutrition Centers, Inc. still has Pittsburgh roots, and our world headquarters is located just two blocks from the original Lackzoom storefront. Today, GNC is the largest global specialty retailer of nutritional products; including vitamin, mineral, herbal and other specialty supplements and sports nutrition, diet and energy products, GNC has more than 4,800 retail locations throughout the United States (including more than 1,000 franchise and 1,200 Rite Aid store-within-a-store locations) and franchise operations in 46 international markets.

**Raising the Bar**

But despite the confidence GNC places in its private fleet, Hartman is not content to rest on the fleet’s laurels. He is constantly looking for strategies to lower operating costs and to boost productivity in the face of rapidly escalating labor, fuel and regulatory costs. That’s where Hartman’s obsession with safety, backhauls, and technology – refined and enhanced by participating in various National Private Truck Council conferences, committee meetings, and networking come in.

“We were at NPTC’s summer on-site Safety Committee meeting a couple of years ago,” Hartman explains, “when we were able to witness a hands-on demonstration of collision mitigation equipment. The benefits were so compelling that we immediately started spec’ing the technology in our new equipment, further improving an already exceptional safety record.

That same focus on raising the bar manifests itself in the efforts to fill empty miles. Hartman has helped develop a return-load system to create greater efficiencies in the supply chain system and lower the overall cost of delivering product outbound to stores.

Next time you visit a GNC store for your Pro Performance AMP Amplified Whey Protein or Triple Strength Fish Oil, remember your purchase was made possible by an organization that recognizes the importance of putting a Certified Transportation Professional in a key management position.