National Truck Driver Appreciation Week



Ezzell-Joyner and her parents, Grover and Louise Ezzell

Careers in Forestry

A SPOTLIGHT ON EZZELL TRUCKING

By Carmela Rossi, Intern, NCFA

There are many career paths individuals can pursue in forestry, and they're all vital to our industry's success. In this special issue of *TreeLine*, and in honor of National Truck Driver Appreciation Week (September 13-19, 2026), we connected with Catherine Ezzell-Joyner, President of Ezzell Trucking, to learn more about her career journey and how she gives back to the trucking industry.

Ezzell-Joyner brings both business expertise and lifelong connections to the organization. After seven years in the leadership role, her experience reflects a unique path shaped both by professional growth and personal history with the business.

Background, Education and Early Career

Ezzell Trucking is a third-generation family business founded in 1951 in Harrells, NC, by James A. Ezzell. While operating a turkey farm, Ezzell struggled to find a dependable trucker to transport his birds to market, so he decided to do the hauling himself. As neighboring farmers saw what he was doing, they began asking him to transport their agricultural products as well, and Ezzell Trucking was born.

Over the years, the company has progressed from its agricultural roots into a specialized wood-residual hauling business, transitioning to 100% wood residual hauling in 2006 and growing through strong partnerships across the wood product industry. Today, the company operates eight locations throughout Eastern North Carolina and Southeastern Virginia and will celebrate its 75th anniversary on November 1, 2026.

Even though Ezzell-Joyner grew up just minutes from the family business and was surrounded by its culture, she followed her father's advice to gain outside experience, earning a business degree from UNC Chapel Hill and an MBA from Wake Forest University, followed by five years of experience in the banking, auditing, and government compliance industry with BB&T Bank (now Truist). Drawn back by what she described as a series of "God winks" and a lifelong connection to the business she grew up around, she returned to Ezzell Trucking, saying "it felt like coming home," and that the trucking industry's "rubber-band effect" ultimately pulled her back in for good!

An Atypical Career Journey

Ezzell-Joyner joined Ezzell Trucking in 2013. Her first role was in human resources, where she spent five years learning the business and its people. As she became more involved in the company, it became very clear that leadership was something that she was passionate about! A formal plan was then put in motion to help her prepare for an executive role within the company.

The timeline changed unexpectedly in 2018- 2019 when the company's president was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. After his retirement and later passing, Ezzell-Joyner found herself moving into the presidency position much sooner than anyone had expected, taking on the role right before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Looking back, she described her journey as "not the typical career progression," but one that set the foundation for the road ahead. Throughout this change, her father was a source of guidance and mentorship, helping her learn how to navigate both the leadership change and the operational side of the business. Today, he continues to work with her, and she credits his support and experience as an important part of her success.



Below: Ezzell-Joyner stands with Ezzell Trucking employee Otis Alston. Alston has been with Ezzell for 12 years in Garysburg, NC and serves as a Driver Trainer.



Above: Ezzell-Joyner stands alongside Grover Ezzell and William Brinson, celebrating Brinson's incredible 27-year legacy as a Harrells, NC-based driver. This photo captures him receiving the well-deserved Driver of the Month award from the NC Trucking Association three years ago.



Ezzell-Joyner joins Grover Ezzell, David Hayes, John Johnson, Roy Merritt, Monte Boykin, George Merritt, and Bobby Montgomery at Ezzell Trucking's Million-Mile Award Banquet to celebrate its drivers who had achieved 1, 2 and 3 million miles without a preventable DOT Accident.



Leading the Organization

Today, Ezzell-Joyner leads Ezzell Trucking by staying rooted within the company's five core values: service, integrity, respect, safety, and commitment, as well as its mission to "excel in service, focus on safety, and partner with integrity." She describes her role as "greasing the wheels," helping remove obstacles and creating an environment where employees can do their jobs successfully. A typical day for her includes solving problems, addressing customers' needs, supporting business development, and constantly looking for new ways to improve processes to make the company more efficient.

"Every day is like drinking from a water hose," she said, explaining that no two days are ever the same and that there is always something new to learn or new challenges in line to tackle. The company works around the clock to meet customer demands, using slip-seat models that keep trucks moving for nearly 20 hours each day while providing schedule options that make it possible for drivers to return home to their families every night.

A strong dedication to safety and service has become one of Ezzell Trucking's great competitive advantages, supported by ongoing investments in modern equipment, employee training, and advanced technology. From electronic logging devices to in-cab cameras to collision avoidance systems, lane departure warnings, and roll stability control, the company's comprehensive safety program shows its dedication to protecting drivers and the public.

Passion, Purpose, and Rewards

One of the most rewarding parts of Ezzell-Joyner's job isn't the trucks or the operations — it's the people. While she does enjoy solving problems and finding new ways to make the business run, what truly motivates her every day is helping her employees, their families, and the communities that they call home. She takes pride in making sure that every employee has access to the resources and support they need, which is one of the reasons why the company has different programs available to its employees. An example is the chaplain program at every location, which offers employees a confidential person to talk to during difficult times, creating a support system that she believes is often missing in the trucking industry. "It's a listening ear for folks who need it," she said, and the positive feedback from employees has shown them just how valuable the program has become.

Her passion for this industry comes from a strong belief that businesses should do more than make a profit — they should help people and communities thrive. Whether she is supporting a driver, helping an employee's family, or investing in the local community, Ezzell-Joyner is constantly asking herself, "How can we make this a better place to live and work?"

MEET THE TRUCK DRIVER

Monte Boykin, Ezzell Trucking

By Jeanne Harmor, Director of Communications, NCFA

Every so often, you meet someone truly passionate about their job. You can feel the joy through the phone as you speak to them, so much that it radiates and fuels your own happiness for the day. Think about the ripple effect!

I recently had the pleasure of speaking with Monte Boykin, a truck driver who has dedicated 30 years of service to Ezzell Trucking. He was kind enough to share his career journey with us in honor of National Truck Driver Appreciation Week.

Born and raised in Mount Olive, NC, and a proud father of four, Boykin began studying business administration at Fayetteville State University. After about a year, he chose a different path and enrolled in truck driving school. This pivot allowed him to earn his certification, and he was hired at Ezzell Trucking.

"Trucking has always been on my mind," said Boykin. "I come from a trucking family. It has always been in my blood!"

A Day in the Life of a Truck Driver

Boykin starts every day with a deep appreciation for his truck, which he owns himself.

"Every morning I check my truck, wash my windshield, check my oil, complete my paperwork, and get ready for the day," said Boykin. "My wife of 42 years will tell you—I do this every day!"



Each day, Boykin picks up his trailer, inspects it, loads it for the run, then hits the road for Wilmington. He then unloads his truck and makes it back to the mill, where he reloads and makes the trip again back to Wilmington. Each trip is about 140 miles, and he makes this haul about three times within the workday, totaling about nine to 10 hours, which fluctuates based on the product volume for the day.

"My favorite part about this job is getting to drive a truck — it's a freeing feeling," said Boykin. "Even after 30 years, I love it so much. It is sad to think about retirement!"



Ezzell-Joyner and Chip Kellum celebrate National Truck Driver Appreciation Week with an Ezzell Drivers booth. They have a booth at all Ezzell Trucking locations and cook steaks to celebrate their employees and drivers.



Ezzell-Joyner and her son, James, go for a ride in an Ezzell Trucking truck.

A Source of Purpose and Pride

Over the years, Boykin's truck-driving career has taken him on routes across the country, as well as closer to home in the Southeastern region. When he started at Ezzell Trucking, he was a company driver, until he eventually purchased his own truck and became an owner/operator. Boykin shared that, all throughout his career journey, he has always demonstrated immense pride in his work.

"I wash my truck at least once a week," he said. "And every so often, I do touch-ups here and there. I've always had a lot of pride in the way I present myself and my truck. When you have the sole possession of something like this every day, you want to show others how proud you are to be in this position. I'm lucky to be doing what I do every day, and I'll never take it for granted!" In 1998, Ezzell Trucking named him Driver of the Year, a designation he remains proud of to this day.

"I still have the certificate and plaque," he said. "I decided in that moment that I wanted to stay working with Ezzell Trucking until I retire. I truly appreciate everything this company has done for me over the years."

Back in the office, Boykin truly feels like a valued member of the Ezzell Trucking team.

"On any given day [I] can walk into the office, talk with people and make them laugh, and everyone knows my name," he said. "Management always makes time for me. Other places, you might feel like you're just a number. No day is perfect in this business, but I'm not going anywhere — there's no other place I'd rather be."

Boykin's Career Advice

If you or someone you know is considering a career in trucking, Boykin has the following advice:

- First, figure out what you want to do. Do you want to run over the road, or run local routes?
- If you want to run over the road (long distances, gone for days/weeks/months at a time), then make sure you come back.
- This decision must fit your lifestyle. If you have a family and kids, running local might be a better option for you. Remember — life moves fast! You don't want to miss the special moments along the way.
- Do your research and find the best company you can. No company is perfect, but you need to find the right fit for you. "At the end of the day, I am lucky that I get to come back to my family and sleep in my own bed," said Boykin. "This is the lifestyle that works best for me. Running the road may work for others, and that's great! Just make sure you take your lifestyle and goals into account when making your decision."



Challenges, Solutions, and Lessons Learned

Like many companies in the trucking industry, Ezzell Trucking has spent years navigating a challenging freight recession, which has been exacerbated by rising fuel costs and economic concerns. Ezzell-Joyner said that there have been a few times "it feels like we're slogging uphill," mainly when the entire industry is facing obstacles that no single company can control. Instead of focusing on those global challenges, she and her leadership team focus on what they can improve within their own organization. This mindset has led to many operational improvements, including transitioning to paperless processes, modernizing administrative tasks, and applying AI-powered technology to improve efficiency and provide faster feedback to drivers.



MEET THE TRUCK DRIVER

Martha Etheridge, Ezzell Trucking

By Jeanne Harmor, Director of Communications, NCFA

When we sat down with Martha Etheridge, a truck driver at Ezzell Trucking, it quickly became clear that we were speaking with a person who is the ultimate professional. Etheridge described herself as a dependable and organized individual who enjoys roles that require great responsibility, provide independence, and are led by strong management teams. After spending almost six years in the trucking industry, with three-and-a-half years at Ezzell Trucking, it seems Etheridge is in the right place!

Early Beginnings

At first, Etheridge thought she wanted to earn a degree in supply chain management, so she began pursuing this path at Wake Tech Community College. Over time, she changed her mind — the open road was calling! She decided to pivot and earn her Commercial Driver's License (CDL) from Nash Community College.

She used this certification to serve as a bus driver for schools in her hometown of Rocky Mount, NC. Etheridge loved giving back to the community in this way, transporting about 100 kids per day and keeping them safe. However, her aunt — a truck driver in the 1980s — inspired her to upgrade her license so she could pursue a career in trucking.

"There was something about that big machine," she said. "I wanted to try it out!"

Etheridge went on to explain that trucking is a male-dominated field, but if her aunt could do it, why couldn't she? She surprised herself by embarking on this challenge and has proven to herself and her team that she can be successful in this role.

A Typical Day

Etheridge starts her day by inspecting her truck, organizing her paperwork, and most importantly, ensuring that the day starts safely. She stays in constant communication with her dispatch team, noting that the drivers for Ezzell Trucking are top tier.

"We all own our routes. No matter the weather conditions, we keep each other informed," she said.

Etheridge runs a local route from North Carolina to Virginia three times a day, and her goal is to complete three loads, which might not look the same every day. Her route takes her to Garysburg, NC, Southampton, VA, and Ahoskie, NC.

The weather and heavy traffic are two factors that can lead to a challenging day, especially when you are operating with tight delivery schedules. Etheridge notes that it's important to plan ahead and focus on the things you can control. At the end of the day, the most important thing is that you are safe, your truck is safe, and everyone around you on the road is safe.

Regardless of the route, Etheridge emphasizes that one of the most rewarding aspects of her job is the ability to deliver loads safely and on time.

"I like keeping businesses and customers supplied," she said. "An added bonus is being able to do local runs. I enjoy coming home to my family every night."

Room to Grow

Etheridge's passion for her role stems from her love of the job, but also the opportunity to advance in her career path.

"I recognize that there is room to grow in this industry, especially at Ezzell Trucking," she said. "I am hopeful that one day I can learn the business side of this industry and work on the contracting team. Whatever role I am serving, I know that my work makes a difference here."

Career Advice

"Stay focused — you can achieve anything you want to achieve," she said. "Most importantly, stay safe. This is a hardworking job, and sometimes the days can be long. However, it's a rewarding career to be in."

THANK A TRUCK DRIVER

Just like we celebrate veterans and service personnel, we should also be giving credit where it is due to truck drivers across the country. If truck drivers stopped their routes for even a day, many industries would suffer, and those challenges would trickle down to consumers like you and me. Make sure you thank a truck driver — this month, and all year long!

One of the company's most important tools has been its anonymous weekly driver survey, which gives employees a chance to share what is working, what is not, and how management can better support them. With strong participation and a commitment to responding quickly to feedback, the surveys have created an environment where employees feel heard and involved in the company's successes. Ezzell-Joyner believes that by constantly improving processes and listening to their people, Ezzell Trucking will be ready to grow and thrive when the industry bounces back.

Ezzell-Joyner's Career Advice

As someone who has spent their life around the trucking industry, Ezzell-Joyner believes its greatest strength is the people within it. "A rising tide lifts everybody," she said, explaining that the industry is filled with individuals who are willing to share their knowledge, answer questions, and help others succeed. Her advice for those considering a career in the trucking industry is to be clear about your values, find mentors and organizations that align with those values, stay curious, and never be afraid to ask questions or pursue unexpected opportunities.

Supporting the Trucking Community

When it comes to National Truck Driver Appreciation Week, Ezzell-Joyner believes recognition should be more than a once-a-year celebration. "Being thankful and showing your thanks are two very different things," she said, stressing that true appreciation is shown through everyday actions such as respecting drivers' time, listening to their feedback, providing the tools they need to do their jobs safely, and recognizing accomplishments.

She also feels that this industry should continue advocating for safer roads, more truck parking, and greater public awareness of the important role that drivers play in keeping communities and the economy moving. Throughout the interview, Ezzell-Joyner explained the importance of teamwork, crediting Ezzell Trucking's success to the dedicated employees who support one another every day and reminding others that, in both trucking and life, "it takes a village"! ■



