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Trucks, Trees, and Tribute: How America's Drivers Deliver Holiday Honor and Cheer

By Jerielis Espinal, NDA A/NTLC Fall Intern

Each holiday season, commercial drivers across the United States take on missions that have a deeper meaning far beyond just moving goods. From hauling wreaths to honor our nation's veterans to transporting the U.S. Capitol Christmas Tree across the country, these drivers play a central role in delivering both respect and joy during the holidays. Behind both heartfelt missions are the commercial motor vehicles (CMVs) and the professional truck drivers who ensure these deliveries reach their destinations safely and on time. Their role is not merely logistical, it is deeply symbolic, patriotic, and personal.

Honoring Veterans, Mile by Mile: Wreaths Across America

Every December, Wreaths Across America (WAA) ensures that thousands of veterans' graves are honored with fresh remembrance wreaths. Their annual wreath-laying tradition is only possible through the generosity and dedication of professional truck drivers.¹

What started as a simple, reverent gesture in 1992 turned into an annual tribute to honor our country's veterans. The Worcester family of Harrington, Maine donated surplus wreaths from their Worcester Wreath Company for grave placement at Arlington National Cemetery. WAA founder Morrill Worcester went to Arlington with 5,000 wreaths that first year, enlisting the help of local truck company owner James Prout. This annual tradition continued quietly until 2005 when a widely circulated photo of the wreaths at Arlington garnered nationwide attention.² As a result, Worcester received thousands of requests to either assist in Arlington or to similarly honor heroes at other National and State cemeteries. The program grew steadily year over year as enthusiasm for the mission expanded across the country. As the mission grew, so did the participation of the trucking industry.³

Each year, hundreds of transportation partners and their drivers join WAA's "Honor Fleet," delivering millions of veterans' wreaths to cemeteries across the nation.⁴ Throughout the years, WAA Board Member and Executive Director of Public Relations at the National Motor Freight Traffic Association (NMFTA) Debbie Sparks has been instrumental in recruiting transportation partners for the Honor Fleet. Sparks stated that what started as a small act has grown into a nationwide movement, with over 2.9 million wreaths delivered to more than 4,225 locations in 2024 alone. Sparks indicated for 2025, WAA's Honor Fleet will include 375 trucking companies, involving approximately 720 truckloads of wreaths, and another 46 loads requiring multiple methods of transport. Drivers have multi-stop loads when delivering veterans' wreaths for WAA, with an average of 8–12 stops per participating driver.

Truckers often form personal connections to the mission, volunteering their time, fuel, and vehicles to ensure wreaths reach cemeteries across the country. Many drivers are veterans themselves, making the mission deeply personal. WAA Transportation & Industry Relations Director Courtney George shared, "Professional drivers and carriers that join WAA's Honor Fleet have the desire to do something meaningful to honor veterans and their loved ones and many say that Wreaths Across America provides a way for them to do that."⁵ One carrier company owner reflected, "There are moments on the road with the Honor Fleet that take your breath away. Watching the wreaths move out across the country, with people lining the streets to honor our veterans, is humbling beyond words."⁶



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¹ Wreaths Across America. Mission Statement. www.wreathscrossamerica.org/About/OurMission

² Wreaths Across America. (2024). *Wreaths Across America Story*. 195005-9858668B-D6B1-45E8-BC04-30648197D9BB.docx

³ *Id.*

⁴ Wreaths Across America. (2025, March 27). Wreaths Across America Celebrates 17 Carriers for 10+ Years of Service as Honor Fleet Members. www.wreathscrossamerica.org/Home/News/1272

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ Wreaths Across America. (2025, September 15). Wreaths Across America Seeking Carriers to Help Move the Mission This December. www.wreathscrossamerica.org/Home/News/1357

Each year, WAA presents the James Prout Spirit of Giving Award to a transportation partner in recognition of the generosity and dedication representative of the WAA mission. The award is given semi-annually to a deserving professional truck driver, transportation company or organization that has supported charitable causes in a way that will affect generations to come.

This year, WAA presented the award to Load One Transportation and Logistics, a carrier headquartered in Detroit. Load One has helped move the WAA mission since 2010. In recognition of Load One, George stated, "Load One has been an incredible partner in helping us fulfill our mission. When other companies or owner-operators can't take a load, they step up, often at the last minute, to ensure every wreath is delivered."⁷ Load One's Executive Chairman John Elliot stated, "It is incredibly meaningful to be selected for the James Prout Spirit of Giving Award by WAA." Elliot further reflected, "I have long said, hauling veterans' wreaths is easily the most sacred cargo we have the honor of delivering each year. I am proud of our team who steps up to volunteer their time, and as a veteran myself, honored to play a part in this important mission."⁸

A Joyful Journey: The Capitol Christmas Tree

While the wreath deliveries carry solemn meaning, the U.S. Capitol Christmas Tree journey brings festive cheer. The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) supports the U.S. Capitol Christmas Tree's journey through its "Our Roads, Our Safety®" program.⁹ FMCSA uses the tree's journey to raise awareness about sharing the road safely with large trucks. It promotes educational materials, coloring pages, and holiday cards to teach non-CMV drivers about CMV blind spots, stopping distances, and wide turns—all critical tips when navigating around large trucks during the holiday season.¹⁰

Each year, a different national forest provides the official tree for the West Lawn of the U.S. Capitol. The 2025 tree is coming from Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest in Nevada; the first time Nevada is supplying the Capitol Tree. The 53-foot red fir nicknamed Silver Belle is being transported by the Knight-Swift Transportation company and driver Michael Porter.¹¹ The U.S. Capitol Christmas Tree tour began on November 1, 2025, and will continue until November 20, 2025, when it is delivered to the U.S. Capitol Building with the ceremonial tree lighting occurring in early December.¹² The tree's journey can be tracked in real-time at kenworth.com/tree-tracker.



The U.S. Capitol Tree Journey is a powerful symbol of unity, tradition, and environmental stewardship. As the tree travels from forest to Capitol, the journey reflects more than community spirit; it relies on the expertise of skilled drivers and the power of CMVs to make it possible. These CMVs ensure the tree travels safely and securely across thousands of miles, turning a logistical feat into a moving celebration of American landscapes and the people who connect them.

⁷ Wreaths Across America (2025, August 12). Wreaths Across America Recognizes Load One Transportation & Logistics as the 2025 Recipient of the "James Prout Spirit of Giving Award." www.wreathsassamerica.org/Home/News/1335

⁸ Id.

⁹ Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration. Share the Road Safely with the U.S. Capitol Christmas Tree. Updated October 7, 2025. www.fmcsa.dot.gov/our-roads/capitol-christmas-tree

¹⁰ Id.

¹¹ Society of American Foresters, (2025, October 28). Knight-Swift Selected to Haul 2025 U.S. Capitol Christmas Tree. *The U.S. Capitol Christmas Tree*. www.uscapitolchristmastree.com/knight-swift-selected-to-haul-2025-u-s-capitol-christmas-tree/

¹² Society of American Foresters, (2025, October 30). Kenworth T680 Featuring Special Design Will Transport U.S. Capitol Christmas Tree to Washington, DC for 12th Year. *The U.S. Capitol Christmas Tree*. www.uscapitolchristmastree.com/kenworth-t680-featuring-special-design-will-transport-u-s-capitol-christmas-tree-to-washington-d-c-for-12th-year/

Behind the Wheel: The Skill and Dedication Required

Both missions showcase the unique role of commercial drivers in American traditions. Driving a CMV requires specialized knowledge, a Commercial Driver's License (CDL), and rigorous skills and knowledge testing.¹³ CDL holders are held to higher safety standards than non-commercial drivers, ensuring wreaths and trees are delivered safely and responsibly, while also protecting the safety and well-being of everyone sharing the road.

The trucking community provides the backbone of these holiday traditions. These drivers ensure that over 5,000 participating locations receive wreaths, requiring hundreds of coordinated truckloads for WAA's success each December.¹⁴

Industry organizations have long supported these missions, while individual companies exemplify the personal pride drivers take in representing their states and communities. CDL drivers also navigate significant challenges from rising fuel costs to nationwide driver shortages, yet they continue to prioritize national remembrance. Their participation demonstrates not just logistical skill, but resilience and patriotism.

CMV drivers who volunteer their time exemplify a unique blend of skill, responsibility, and selflessness. Their ability to safely operate large vehicles under varying conditions requires extensive training and experience, but it's their dedication to serving others that truly sets them apart.

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The Heart of the Holidays

This December, trucks will roll down highways across America carrying more than cargo. They carry pride, remembrance, and joy; reminders that the holiday season is about honoring the past, celebrating the present, and sharing the spirit of giving. From wreaths on graves to a tree at the nation's Capital, America's drivers ensure that the season reaches every corner of the country. Both WAA and the U.S. Capitol Christmas Tree represent more than seasonal traditions, they are national acts of remembrance and celebration. The commercial motor vehicle industry plays a pivotal role in making these events possible, transforming ordinary deliveries into extraordinary missions. Whether WAA truckers are delivering honor and healing, or the Capitol Tree carriers are hauling unity and joy, these drivers are not just moving freight, they are moving hearts.

About the Author

Jerielis Espinal is a senior at St. John's University in Queens, New York, pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice through the Honors Program. She is currently completing a fall internship with the National District Attorneys Association, where she assists with legal research and contributes articles on key initiatives and events. On campus, Jerielis serves as a mentor in the RISE program and is active in forensic and investigative coursework, including Criminal Investigation, Forensic Psychology, and American Correctional Systems. Beyond her academic work, she is the lead receptionist at Elite Amenities Company, where she manages front desk operations and supervises a team of receptionists. With a strong interest in investigative analysis and public service, Jerielis aspires to pursue a career as an Investigative Analyst after graduation, combining her skills in research, writing, and analysis to support justice-focused organizations.



¹³ 49 C.F.R. Part 383

¹⁴ Wreaths Across America (2025, August 18). Wreaths Across America Honors Professional Drivers at the National Truck Driving Championship in Minneapolis. www.wreathscrossamerica.org/Home/News/1338