



Truck City's "employee-friendly" facility was designed to maximize performance.

# DRIVING FORCE

## Truck City's Long Ride Continues

By **Symone C. Skrzycki**

Gerri Davis-Parker is in a league of her own. She's at the helm of Truck City, a heavy-duty truck dealership her grandfather founded nearly 70 years ago in Gary. She's one of only three female dealer principals in North America.

But what of the fact that she's a woman in a male-dominated industry?

"I never gave it a lot of thought," she shares. "Everybody points it out to me, but I don't really think much about it because it's just what I do. I was never told, 'I couldn't' by my parents. I was just told, 'Don't expect special treatment because you're a girl.' "

And she hasn't.

Davis-Parker joined Truck City in 1997 and worked in every department before being named general manager in 2000. She's been

in the driver's seat for approximately eight years as president and CEO.

Davis-Parker praises employees for Truck City's history of accomplishments, which include flourishing for seven decades in a city that's faced growing economic and social challenges. As for her own success, she credits two things:

"I've been around trucks my entire life. I've been around the dealership my entire life," she remarks. "(Second), I didn't come to the dealership right out of college. Actually, my degree is in criminal justice. I spent 10 years as a police officer. That also, in especially the mid- to late 1980s, was a male-dominated field. It still is a very male-dominated field." Davis-Parker subsequently worked at a major insurance company as a fraud investigator.

Start your engines for this journey into Truck City's early days and what's on the road ahead.

### Getting up to speed

Truck City (original name: Gary White Sales and Service) was established in 1946 by Paul G. Davis and Jack Erickson as a Pure Oil

gas station at the corner of 5th and Chase streets. One of those Pure Oil pumps, paying homage to the organization’s roots, greets customers and visitors in Truck City’s lobby.

“We were a jeep dealer (the line eventually was dropped to focus exclusively on commercial vehicles) and a White Truck dealer,” Davis-Parker explains. “White Motor Corporation was one of the foundations of the trucking industry. They were one of the first heavy-duty truck manufacturers. That’s how we started.”

In 1951, the company began to market and service Freightliner trucks. Today, it’s one of the largest Freightliner dealers in the industry. Truck City works closely with Daimler Trucks North America, which is the parent company to Freightliner and Western Star.

Additional milestones included moving to Chicago Avenue in 1960, adopting a new name (Truck City of Gary) in 1987 and relocating to its current facility to make room for the Gary/Chicago International Airport expansion in 2008.

“We had opportunities to move to other areas in Northwest Indiana, but next year will be our 70th year in business. We really wanted to stay in Gary and found this spot out on (Interstate) 94,” she stresses, gazing at the highway through her office window. “This section of 94 west of (Interstate) 65 is one of the heaviest-traveled truck corridors in the United States. This was an absolutely ideal location for us. The city worked hard to keep us here and was really helpful in the process.”

During this time, Gerri’s father, Art (who had taken over the company), sold the balance of his ownership interest in the dealership to Gerri and her brother, Paul. In 2014, she became a 100% owner. And in 2015, the company rebranded and debuted a shorter name: Truck City.

“We needed a more global look to the company as a national WBE (Women’s Business Enterprise)-certified business,” she recalls. “We didn’t want to limit ourselves with the ‘of Gary’ name brand, so we designed a new logo and rolled out a new branding strategy. That

was very exciting.”

Davis-Parker smiles as she fondly recalls a childhood memory.

“One of the things that sticks out is as kids, the game we played in the car on road trips wasn’t the license plate game or anything like that. It was who could identify the oncoming truck by brand faster than the other one in the car. My dad always beat us!

“I think with a lot of family businesses, it creeps into the private life. It creeps into the family life, even with the kids.”

**Economic engine**

Life moves quickly at Truck City. That’s evident in a tour of the 50,000-square-foot facility.

“It’s a very fast-paced business,” Davis-Parker remarks. “We talk a lot about this with our folks – everybody’s truck that’s sitting here is losing money. If they’re not moving, they’re not making any money. We’re a very just-in-time delivery (business) ... we’re very, very tied to the supply chain in the country as far as keeping things up and running.”

It’s also an extremely precise business.

“Trucks aren’t built like cars. A customer will sit down and say, ‘OK, I want a Cummins engine or I want a Detroit diesel engine (for instance),’ ” she observes, slapping her hand for emphasis. “The truck is component built. It’s specced out to exactly what the customer needs for its particular application.”

A few standouts on the tour are a 30-bay shop (features a containment facility for potential spills), high-tech computer-driven storage system (boasts 63 shelves to hold inventory) and a lounge (offers beverages, a television, Internet access and more) to accommodate drivers while their vehicles are repaired.

**Behind the wheel**

Among Truck City’s 63 employees are several females.

“We have probably more women (on staff) than most



Toni Hill, training a new employee, is one of first faces people see when they arrive at Truck City.



Three generations: Gerri Davis-Parker and her father, Art, proudly stand beside a portrait of her grandfather, Paul Davis, who founded the company in 1946.



Top drawer! A high-tech system speeds up the shelving process by placing items most frequently used at the bottom.



Breaking ground on Truck City’s current site in 2007.

## Technology Tells Truckers Where to ‘Park It’

Scenic travels along the interstate often include farmland, cows and ... commercial trucks parked on highway shoulders and exit ramps. In many cases, drivers pull over for mandatory rest periods after searching for 15 minutes (on the low end) or upwards of an hour for open spaces at rest areas and private facilities.

Innovative technology is paving the way for a smoother ride.

The Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) unveiled the Interstate 94 Truck Parking Information and Management System (TPIMS) last September. It stretches 129 miles through an international trade corridor in southwest Michigan traveled by approximately 10,000 trucks daily. If carried out nationally, the system reportedly could save \$4.4 billion annually in wasted idling and “looking” costs.

Here’s how it works.

Truck Smart Parking Services Inc., headquartered in Michigan, developed TPIMS to enhance driver safety and efficiency by providing real-time information regarding parking availability. Missouri-based HNTB Corporation – an infrastructure solutions firm that planned, designed and oversaw installation – deployed detection cameras and

other sensors at 15 public and private parking areas along I-94. Drivers can access the data in a variety of ways: via dynamic roadside signs (updated automatically), smartphone applications, web sites and connected vehicle technology.

“I don’t know why any trucking association or trucking companies wouldn’t support this because this actually happens to be one of our top five priorities in the state of Indiana,” declares Barbara Hunt, vice president of the Indiana Motor Truck Association. “Every year, the American Transportation Research Institute will conduct a survey nationwide and then they’ll also break it down by state. In the state of Indiana, truck parking was one of the top three concerns.”

She adds, “Any time you can streamline your route and be more efficient instead of pulling in somewhere and idling slowly, and then pulling out and going to the next (option), it’s obviously going to help with costs.”

The Indiana Department of Transportation currently is discussing the smart truck parking concept with other states.



**RESOURCES:** Barbara Hunt, Indiana Motor Truck Association, at [www.intrucking.org](http://www.intrucking.org) | Truck Smart Parking Services at [www.trucksmaparking.com](http://www.trucksmaparking.com) | Photos provided by HNTB Corporation ([www.hntb.com](http://www.hntb.com))

dealerships,” Davis-Parker contends.

Crystal Frost-Doeing is the controller, a position typically held by men in the trucking world. She was the first person Davis-Parker hired (a fact the latter proudly declares when making introductions) and has been with the company for 15 years.

“It’s grown to be my second home,” Frost-Doeing reflects as she describes the close-knit team. “Gerri has this vision, this ability to kind of go, ‘This is where I want to be in 10 years – let’s figure out how to get there.’ Everybody can say that, but not everybody can put the plan into action and she seems to be able to do that.”

Part of that strategy involves training, which takes many forms. In addition to hosting internal training, the company facilitates sessions for partner organizations.

“I think there’s a real opportunity for education,” asserts master tech trainer Robert Dorrance. “I never went to a trade school. It was pretty much learn as you earn, if you will. (Here), it’s a constant barrage almost of training – something new on a daily basis from the vendors or Freightliner themselves.”

Shop foreman Shannon Halle manages the master tech trainers (there are three.) The trio has a combined 92 years of experience working on and repairing diesel engines.

“It’s a great bunch of guys. The respect they give me (is tremendous),” she proclaims.

### Making the sale

“In this hallway here is the sales staff,” Davis-Parker notes. Adorning the walls are calendars featuring customers at various stages of the facility’s construction.

Butch Ritchie, national sales manager, stands to greet us as we enter his office. He enjoys the challenging nature of his work. “There’s never a dull moment,” he muses.

Ritchie participated in a “ride and drive” in Las Vegas this spring as DaimlerChrysler debuted the first self-driving truck (designed

to stop before it hits an object). He marvels at the experience.

“We (Ritchie and fellow salespeople) were sitting on the bed in the back of a truck and they put us in a 20-mile-an-hour reduced barrier (to demonstrate the technology),” he recalls.

Hands-on exposure – or hands-off in this case – is crucial to success at Truck City

Davis-Parker asserts, “In order to sell that product, it’s the manufacturer’s belief – and I tend to agree with them – that you have to convince the salesmen that it’s a product worth having.”

### Big wheels keep on turning

Davis-Parker praises employees for Truck City’s longevity.

“I think the complete and total success of everything that goes on here is attributed to the employees who work here,” she declares. “They invest a lot. They invest a lot of their lives, their time here. Our success is simply their success.”

Who will slide into the driver’s seat one day when Davis-Parker retires? She has two sons, ages 15 and 20, but wants them to chart their own course.



Master tech trainer Rob Spurr joined Truck City in 1976. He’s the last employee who worked with all three generations of ownership.

“Our oldest has loved the water since he was a baby – especially salt water. He relocated to Key West and has a job there taking people out scuba diving and spear fishing. Our youngest wants to become an astrophysicist.

“Life tends to present the proper endings to everything – whether it’s this generation or whether I have a niece or nephew that comes along that’s interested, I don’t know, but I don’t want any of them to feel forced or compelled or guilted into being here.”

**RESOURCE:** Truck City at [www.mytruckcity.com](http://www.mytruckcity.com)



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