Finalists Announced for 2026 Transition Trucking: Driving for Excellence Award

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CHILLICOTHE, OH, UNITED STATES, September 28, 2026 / EINPresswire.com/ -- Finalists for the 11th annual “Transition Trucking: Driving for Excellence” award were recently announced by Kenworth Truck Company, Fastport, and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation's Hiring Our Heroes program. This distinguished award celebrates military veterans who have successfully transitioned into professional truck driving careers. Following a thorough nomination and review process and culminating in a final public vote, the program will honor and reward America's top rookie military veteran drivers.

> These five finalists carry the leadership and judgment that define a military career into the driver's seat, and they have done it in their first year on the road.”
>
> *Sarah Abernathy, Kenworth Director of Marketing Communications*

In Ohio last week, 11 semi-finalists, "The Elite 11”, were distinguished guests at a recognition dinner held at the National Veterans Memorial and Museum in Columbus. The following day, the Kenworth truck manufacturing plant in Chillicothe hosted the event where finalists were announced, along with an exclusive behind-the-scenes tour of Kenworth's flagship manufacturing facility. While in Columbus, the drivers sat for interviews with the award program and recorded their stories for the museum's StoryCorps archive.

In the weeks leading up to the Ohio events, the semi-finalists appeared on SiriusXM's Road Dog Trucking Radio and sat for long-form interviews with PodWheels, which were featured in The Trucker.

This year's class is the most senior in the program's history, with six of the eleven semi-finalists leaving service at E-7 or above, including two Sergeants Major. Registered Apprenticeship again shaped the field: 60% of the nominations received came from drivers who are completing or have completed a U.S. Department of Labor Registered Apprenticeship program, and five of the Elite 11 are apprentices today.



The winner will be announced at West Point as part of the Veteran Ready Summit on Tuesday, December 15th

Finalists for 2026 are summarized below in alphabetical order by last name:

Finalist #1 Mohammad Arzola, U.S. Marine Corps (E-9), Patriot Group International
Sergeant Major Mohammad “Mo” Arzola enlisted in the United States Marine Corps in 1997 and served 27 years as a machine gunner, drill instructor and senior enlisted leader, with assignments including 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, 1st Marine Raider Battalion, and multiple aviation commands as squadron sergeant major. He deployed in support of Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom, earning the Purple Heart and the Combat Action Ribbon. A San Antonio native, Mo graduated from California Career Schools and logged more than 100,000 safe miles to earn the Spirit of HEB Award before driving for Patriot Group International.

Finalist #2 Monica Brooks-Buck, U.S. Army (E-7), Werner Enterprises
Monica Brooks-Buck is a retired U.S. Army veteran with nearly 25 years of service, including more than 20 years in logistics as a 92Y supply specialist and an Army Master Driver. She graduated from the Truck Driver Institute in Saucier, Mississippi, and joined Werner Enterprises in September 2025, where she is a registered apprentice in the Werner Enterprises Truck Driver Apprenticeship. Monica drives as part of a professional team with her husband while pursuing studies in information technology. She belongs to the Women In Trucking Association and Disabled American Veterans.

Finalist #3 Daniel Doss, U.S. Air Force (E-5), Melton Truck Lines
Staff Sergeant Daniel Doss was raised in the San Francisco Bay Area and enlisted in the U.S. Air Force in 2015, serving 10 years as a fuels specialist. He supported humanitarian relief operations following Hurricane Michael, served on the Base Honor Guard rendering final military honors to

veterans, and led fuel operations and maintenance teams stateside and on deployment to the United Arab Emirates. Daniel graduated from Troops Into Transportation at Fort Benning and joined Melton Truck Lines in September 2025, where he drives flatbed as a registered apprentice. He and his wife have three children.

Finalist #4 Brandon Ward, U.S. Navy (E-8), Werner Enterprises
Senior Chief Petty Officer Brandon Ward retired twice before he ever climbed into a Class 8 truck. He served more than 22 years in the U.S. Navy as a Master-at-Arms and Expeditionary Warfare Specialist, then built a senior career with the Department of Homeland Security, where he served as a hiring official and sat on recruitment teams that brought transitioning service members into the federal workforce. Brandon graduated from Roadmaster Drivers School in Orlando in September 2025 and joined Werner Enterprises later that month as a registered apprentice. A husband and father, he continues to mentor veterans through their own transitions.

Finalist #5 Gary W. Williams, U.S. Army (E-9), Stevens Transport
Command Sergeant Major Gary W. Williams served 31 years in the U.S. Army as a leader, a medic and a mentor, retiring as a Chief Medical NCO. He graduated from Southern Careers Institute in January 2026 and joined Stevens Transport weeks later, where he has built a stellar safety record and taken to the autonomy and accountability the job demands. Soldiers he once led still call him for advice, and he makes himself available to them. Gary supports the Travis Manion Foundation, turning out for its walks, marches and hikes.

The five finalists represent four branches of the U.S. Armed Forces — the Army, the Navy, the Marine Corps and the Air Force.
Under the “Transition Trucking: Driving for Excellence” recognition program, Kenworth will provide the grand prize for the 11th consecutive year. This year's award is a T680 equipped with a 76-inch sleeper and the PACCAR Powertrain featuring the PACCAR MX-13 engine, PACCAR TX-12 automated transmission, and PACCAR DX-40 tandem rear axles.

The T680 also includes the latest in driver assistance systems, including Kenworth's DigitalVision Mirrors, Bendix Fusion Adaptive Cruise Control (ACC) Stop and Auto Go, and Lane Keeping Assist with Torque Assisted Steering. The 76-inch sleeper features a Diamond VIT interior in charcoal with high-quality leather driver and passenger seats with titanium accents that are fully heated and cooled. The Kenworth T680 also includes the latest in driver amenities, including a factory-installed refrigerator, a rotating work table, and space for the everyday conveniences that bring the comforts of home to the road. While the grand prize winner will drive away in a state-of-the-art Kenworth T680 truck, the program also ensures every finalist is recognized. The runner-up will receive a $10,000 award and the remaining finalists will each receive a $5,000 prize, underscoring the program's commitment to the success of all honorees who served and are excelling in the commercial trucking industry. All five finalists and the overall winner will also receive prize packs from Road Dog Care Co., OOIDA and Truck Parking Club.

All five finalists will travel to the United States Military Academy at West Point in December as

guests of the program, taking part in a slate of experiences built around the Veteran Ready Summit ahead of the winner announcement.

“These five finalists carry the leadership and judgment that define a military career into the driver's seat, and they have done it in their first year on the road. Celebrating the accomplishments of this elite group is a special honor each year, and we look forward to awarding the keys to the grand prize Kenworth T680 truck to this year's winner at West Point,” said Sarah Abernethy, Kenworth's director of marketing communications.

Eric Eversole, President of Hiring Our Heroes and a Vice President of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, remarked, “The Transition Trucking award campaign continues to spotlight the extraordinary contributions veterans are making in the transportation industry. These five finalists show transitioning service members exactly what a trucking career can offer, and how quickly it can be built.”

Brad Bentley, President of Fastport, added, “This is the most senior group of drivers we have ever put in front of the Selection Committee, and more of them came to us through Registered Apprenticeship than in any year prior. Our five finalists are still serving their country, just with a different set of keys.”
The Transition Trucking contest continues to serve as a beacon for veteran drivers, showcasing the incredible opportunities available within the trucking industry. Public voting for the award will be held from November 1 through Veterans Day, November 11, and is an important factor in the Selection Committee's final deliberations. The final winner will be revealed on December 15 at the Veteran Ready Summit at the United States Military Academy at West Point.

About Kenworth
Kenworth Truck Company, founded in 1923, specializes in the design and manufacture of The World's Best® heavy- and medium-duty trucks. As a leader in the development of advanced clean diesel powertrains, zero and near-zero emissions vehicles, connected truck technologies, and advanced driver assistance systems, Kenworth is creating transportation solutions to drive a better world. Kenworth's Internet home page is at www.kenworth.com. Kenworth is a PACCAR company.

About Fastport
Fastport Inc. solves America's toughest recruiting challenges through research, technology, and people. Fastport is also a U.S. Department of Labor Industry Intermediary to support registered apprenticeship development and sustainability. For more information, visit www.fastport.com or www.nationalapprenticeship.org.

About Hiring Our Heroes Foundation
Since 2011, Hiring Our Heroes has worked to create meaningful employment opportunities for transitioning service members, veterans, and military spouses. Leveraging a broad array of private and public sector partners, as well as an extensive network of businesses, Hiring Our

Heroes provides the nation's heroes with the right tools, resources, and connections to get the job done. For more information, visit HiringOurHeroes.org.

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