Some people know what they want to do in life at a very early age. Bill Williams is one of those people. Starting from childhood — spent helping his father at a humble tire store in Kingston, Pa., Bill Williams has built Moosic, Pa.-based Jack Williams Tire Co. into one of the largest and most successful independent tire dealerships in the eastern United States. He’s done it the old-fashioned way: by working hard, being honest and taking care of his customers.

Bill Williams is a traditionalist. But he’s also an innovator and a risk taker. His ability to see opportunities where others don’t and then capitalize on them with quiet consistency, discipline and fairness has done more than generate spectacular returns for his company.

It’s won him the respect and friendship of customers, suppliers and employees alike. And it’s also one of the reasons why he’s the 2006 Modern Tire Dealer Tire Dealer of the Year.

Life’s work

Bill’s father, Jack Williams Sr., started the company in 1929 with a $500 loan from Bill’s grandfather and other family members.

“My father knew his future was going to be in the tire business.”

Jack sold used tires and fixed old batteries at first. He eventually bought several second-hand retread molds.

Money was tight in those days, but that didn’t stop Jack from building a loyal customer base.

“He had a ledger, and people would come in and buy tires on credit. He’d say, ‘Where do you work and how much can you pay me a week?’ He’d put their name and address on a ledger.

“Every week they’d stop and buy a couple of dollars of gas and put a couple of dollars on their tire bill, no receipts. It was all on a hand-shake. He did that for hundreds of people.

“I was with him one day, and we went to a customer who owed him money. There were a bunch of children running around. The people were really poor. The guy told us how he’d lost his job, and before we left, my father gave him $20.”

During this time, Bill’s mother, Loretta, stayed home to raise Bill and his older brothers, Jim and Jack Jr. She also helped Jack Sr. by typing up sales statements.

Bill’s love affair with the tire business started at an early age.

“Back in the Depression, when he was building the business, they only opened banks a couple of hours a day because everyone was taking their money out,” says Bill.

“My father would be standing at the door so he could put his money in.”

The local bank manager even made special arrangements for Jack so he could avoid the crowds that gathered at the bank’s door.

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“I was in my father’s way since I was old enough to walk.

“He’d take me home, greased from head to toe.”

Bill began working in the business during junior high school. At the time, the Williams family lived 15 miles away from the store.

“We had a milkman and I’d catch him on the way home from school and jump on his

Continued on page 20...
Continued from page 18...

truck. He’d give me a ride to work every day after school.”

Bill took off from school during snow tire season to sell and change tires at his father’s shop. “I liked the business. I wanted to be there all the time.”

‘Rewards will be there’

As time marched on, Bill took on more responsibilities at the dealership. “I’d sell tires, change the tires and go back out and collect the money. We only had five or six people at the time.

“My big thing was to go through the tickets after we closed and see how many tires we sold. I’d call my dad at home and say, ‘We sold this many today.’

“I remember thinking, ‘If we could sell $250,000 a year, that would be something.’ I always set goals. And I never hit my number before I was setting the next goal. I’d put a plan into action but I’d also be thinking of the next project at the same time.”

That’s exactly what happened when Jack Sr. went on vacation in 1968. Bill signed Jack’s name on a $50,000 loan that he used to buy a much-needed warehouse!

Jack didn’t find out about the loan or the transaction until he came home. “He didn’t talk to me for a few days. I didn’t know if I was going to continue to have a job or not. But he got over it, and finally, after we moved in, he was at the ribbon cutting smiling from ear to ear.”

That year Bill also married Sandi, whom he had courted for 12 months. Sandi was working as a bank teller when they met.

“I convinced her to give up her job and take an easier job with me. She went from working 40 hours to 60,” he says with a laugh.

Sandi helped out in a variety of capacities. “She did the books, she was my runner, she delivered tires and did everything else under the sun.”

“It was 24/7,” says Sandi. She had relatives who ran their own business, so she knew that long hours would be the norm at the dealership.

“In the early days, vacations were very few,” she recalls. “It might be one or two nights at the most. I remember during our honeymoon something happened at the retread shop and after five days we had to come home.”

Sandi stayed involved with the business while raising their children, Scott, Tracey and Jason, who are now principals in Jack Williams Tire.

“She now mainly concentrates on the real estate side of the business,” says Bill. “All the decorations in the stores... she works with architects and contractors.”

Early on, Bill realized that the dealership would have to expand in order to survive.

“The warehouse really started the growth of our company because it gave us room to put service bays in our Kingston store. We put a waiting room in. It also gave us room to expand our wholesale business. That was the turning point.”

The family also installed a retread plant in the warehouse.

Around the same time, Bill received an unexpected crash course in financial matters, courtesy of a long-time customer named Clem Perkins, who ran a local bank.

“One day he stopped in and said, ‘I’d like to take you to lunch. I’ve watched the way you work and the changes you’ve made. We need some young blood on our bank board.’

“I went home and told my wife, ‘I can’t even spell balance sheet much less read one!’ But she convinced me to go out and do it.”

To sit on the bank’s board, a person had to own at least 30 shares. Perkins gave 30 of his own shares to Bill, who was more than a little apprehensive.

“Everybody on the board was at least twice as old as I was and most of them were three times as old. They sat me between these two guys who owned big shopping centers. But after two or three meetings, I started to feel more comfortable.”

Serving on the bank board taught Bill how to scrutinize balance sheets, achieve returns on investments and successfully perform other functions that he applied to Jack Williams Tire.

“It opened my eyes and it got me out of my own little world of tires. I got to see other businesses and how they operate.”

Over the years, Bill served on other bank boards and has invested in businesses like hotels and restaurants. He also has large real estate holdings. In the early ’90s, he and several associates even formed their own bank, First Heritage Bank, which they sold in 2004.

“When you get involved with something that starts as a discussion and then you make the thing successful, it’s a great feeling,” he says. “My father always told me, ‘Don’t put the money first. Work hard and the rewards will be there.’”

Survival and growth

Jack Williams Tire’s business continued to grow. Then disaster struck in 1972, when the Susquehanna River, which runs through the middle of Kingston, flooded. The Kingston store was submerged below 16 feet of water.

“I went over the roof on a boat,” says Bill. “There was no flood insurance at the time. I thought we were done.”

Fortunately, the dealership had survived another flood some 30 years earlier, “so my father gave me a lot of advice on what to do.

“Back in the ’40s, all the (under-Continued on page 22...
Hardwork and honesty have enabled Bill Williams to become a trusted and well-respected businessman within the tire industry. Not only does Mr. Williams garner the trust of his customers and employees, but the respect and admiration of Continental Tire North America, Inc. as well.

*Congratulations to*

**Bill Williams**

Modern Tire Dealer’s 2006 Tire Dealer of the Year

*from*

Continental Tire North America Inc.

*It’s an honor to do business with you.*
ground) gas tanks came to the surface during the flood because of their buoyancy. He said, ‘Make sure when you leave that you open the domes on the top of the tanks to let the water run in, so you don’t lose the tanks.’"

The idea was to replace air in the tanks with water so the tanks wouldn’t pop up through the ground.

“So there I stood with water up to my ankles, watching water go into the tanks!”

Jack Sr.’s advice was right on the money. “When the water went down a couple of days later, everyone’s tanks were out of the ground except ours.”

Jack Williams Tire was the only functional gasoline supplier in town. Bill also was building a new store in nearby Wilkes-Barre, Pa., when the flood hit.

“We stopped construction of the Wilkes-Barre store and brought that crew in to rebuild our Kingston store. Our suppliers gave us lines of credit so we could get going again.”

The clean-up took some time, “but we recovered and it made us a stronger company.”

Ironically, the same scene almost repeated itself earlier this summer, when the eastern U.S. was buffeted by heavy downpours.

“They weren’t sure if the dike system was going to hold,” he says. As a precaution, Kingston was evacuated.

“The order came on a Wednesday afternoon. By 2 p.m. that day we had four or five 53-foot trailers and several vans, and we took all of our tires and equipment out.”

The river crested and the dikes held. By Friday morning, the store was open for business again.

Expansion continued throughout the ‘70s and ‘80s under Bill’s direction. (Bill bought out his eldest brother, Jim, in 1980.) “I always had enough faith in myself that I could make it happen.”

In 1988, Jack Williams Tire opened a 100,000-square-foot facility in Moosic, Pa., which serves as its main warehouse and corporate office.

Bill bought out his other brother, Jack Jr., three years later. “We eventually went from eight stores to 24 stores.”

The markets in which Jack Williams Tire did business were changing. “The small, single independent tire dealers who had two or three employees went by the wayside. They didn’t keep up with the changes.

“Up until that point, the guy who worked the hardest seemed to be the most successful. That changed to the guy who was the most innovative.”

As the company grew, Bill discovered that he had to start delegating authority, which he initially found to be difficult.

“When I had three stores, I tried to run all three. It was hard turning customers over to someone else. We now have stores that do three or four times the volume that we used to do, and I’ve never sold a tire in any of them.”

The Moosic facility allowed the company to develop its wholesale business. “We added route trucks and salespeople.” The dealership also sold and serviced commercial tires.

Jack Sr. was active in the business until he died in 1995. “He was my best friend,” says Bill. “Even though he got a little mad at a few things I did along the way, we were always good buddies.”

Members of Bill Williams’ family — from left to right: Jason, Sandi, Tracey, Scott and Stephanie — play key roles in the company. "They work hard, they work long hours and they enjoy doing it,” says Bill.

Continued from page 20...

Built on tires

At a time when an increasing number of dealers depend on service to boost their bottom lines, Bill prefers to focus on what made his company: tires.

“My father started this company as a tire company. We’ve built our customer loyalty and traffic on tires.

“Very few people say, ‘I think my car needs new brakes. Let’s look through the newspaper and see who has the best deal.’

“A lot of my competitors, as soon as their car count goes down, put up signs that (advertise) $9.95 oil changes. I say, ‘This guy must not be doing very well.’ Consumers aren’t stupid. When they see someone selling an oil change for half or a third of what the real value is, they know it’s a gimmick.

“I’m not saying you have to concentrate 100% on tires. But if you build traffic with tires, service work will come automatically.

“The stores that do the most tire units — the stores that do 90 or 100 tires a day — sell more service. We try to make our customers into clients. If you make them a good tire customer, you’ll get their service business.

“There’s plenty of business out there,” says Bill. “You can be successful by being honest. I truly believe that. There’s a need for our products and a..."
Thanks, Bill, for blazing a path we all can follow.

We salute Bill Williams of Jack Williams Tire for being named 2006 Tire Dealer of the Year.

Your company’s integrity and dedication to bringing the highest quality products and latest technologies to your customers makes Air Products proud to be your supplier.

UltraFill™ 99+
High-Purity Nitrogen Tire Inflation

www.UltraFill99.com
Continued from page 22...

lot of cars that need to be fixed. There’s no reason to sell anybody anything they don’t need.”

Jack Williams Tire has built its thriving wholesale business based on the same philosophy — putting the customer first.

The dealership has 1,500 active wholesale accounts. “Between our Internet and voice mail systems, they can order tires at eight at night and have delivery by the next day.”

Jack Williams runs 20 delivery trucks out of its Moosic facility and also operates a network of “hot shot” vans that guarantee half-hour delivery. When necessary, employees have delivered tires by car.

“It’s impossible for a customer to stock everything, especially today. The smaller dealers we service depend on us to get a tire to them by a certain time. Wholesale is competitive, just like retail,” he explains. “It’s tough, especially when we open a new store in a new market where we already have a good wholesale base. Now we’re moving into a guy’s backyard.

“I try to tell them, ‘We don’t look at you as a competitor. We’re not going after your customers. You have the customers you have because they’re loyal to you.’ We’ve lost customers over it, but I don’t know of any that we haven’t gained back.”

Jack Williams Tire helps wholesale customers with advertising and also sells them equipment. It doesn’t dictate pricing. “All of our wholesalers who are on-line with us have access to our retail pricing. They only thing we ask is that they don’t undercut us.”

“We’re both in the same marketplace, but we’ve been able to work together,” says Steve Grimes, co-owner of Lehigh Tire & Service Center Inc., a five-outlet chain based in Bethlehem, Pa.

Grimes has bought tires from Bill for more than 10 years. “We use his organization every day. They’re extremely fair.”

Ernie King, owner of K&K Tire Barns in Tunkhannock, Pa., started buying tires from Jack Sr. in 1978. “Jack was a nice guy. He’d do anything to help you, the same as Bill.”

One of Bill’s most outstanding qualities is his promptness, according to King.

Continued on page 26...

MTD Tire Dealer Profile — Bill Williams

Full name: William C. Williams
Age: 62
My family: wife, Sandi; sons, Scott and Jason; daughter, Tracey; daughters-in-law Stephanie and Katie; granddaughters, Emily and Abby.

I am most proud of: my family and their commitment to continue to grow our business along with the Jack Williams Tire team.

My hobbies/interests include: fishing, boating and selling tires.

My favorite childhood memory: my father teaching me how to change tires.

My biggest regret: not being able to spend more time with my family in our younger years when I was so busy building the business. Thank God they understood!

My favorite book: I never had the time or attention span to read long novels. I enjoy reading business magazines and trade journals.

My favorite food: a nice juicy steak.

My favorite politician: Ronald Reagan.

Am I a morning or night person? morning, usually 5 a.m.

If I could change one thing about myself: I would learn to be more patient.

My most humbling experience: the 1972 flood that wiped out our only store.

The smartest thing I’ve ever done: marry Sandi and make her a part of my other love, the tire business.

Best advice my parents gave me: Set your goals and then work hard to exceed them. Don’t focus on the rewards. If you work hard and are honest, the rewards will come automatically.

My advice to my children: Be honest and believe in yourselves. Always put your family first.

My goal in life is: to be the best possible mentor to my children and grandchildren.

My advice to a tire dealer who is just starting out: Put a plan together and follow it. Fine-tuning is always necessary, but don’t keep changing your plan. And most of all, self discipline is a must.

The greatest thing about the tire industry today: the challenges we face almost on a daily basis and the feeling of accomplishment when we meet and beat those challenges. The second greatest thing is the interesting characters you meet along the way.

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The greatest thing about the tire industry today: the challenges we face almost on a daily basis and the feeling of accomplishment when we meet and beat those challenges. The second greatest thing is the interesting characters you meet along the way.

My favorite sport: football.

My favorite athlete: Terry Bradshaw.

My favorite movie: I never could sit still or stay awake long enough to watch movies!

My favorite politician: Ronald Reagan.

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If I could change one thing about myself: I would learn to be more patient.

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We’d like to say a few kind words about Bill Williams.

Vision, integrity and success
are the first ones that come to mind.

American Car Care Centers congratulates

Bill Williams
of Jack Williams Tire
2006 Tire Dealer of the Year

Under his visionary leadership,
Bill Williams has taken the company
founded by his father Jack to amazing
new heights. We’re proud to recognize
this important milestone in Bill’s career
and salute his exemplary work ethic,
character and integrity.

Congratulations, Bill! We’re very proud
that you’re part of our company.

Your friends and partners at ACCC.
mmercial, it was really tough putting a
long-range plan into effect.
“It takes a lot of capital, and it’s hard
to run — you have to devote a lot of
time to it. I did service calls for 20
years.”
Bill chose to get out of commercial
and sold that part of his business to
Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co., one of
his major suppliers, in 2001. The trans-
action included two truck tire centers,
an OTR division and the company’s re-
tread plant. “Probably the best night of
sleep I ever had was when I signed
those papers,” he says.
The sale allowed Bill to focus exclu-
sively on retail and wholesale. It also
generated proceeds that were funneled
back into those sectors.

One step ahead
Bill saw bigger and more profitable
endeavors on the horizon, especially as
his three children continued to grow
into their current positions within the
company.
“They were all raised in the busi-
ness,” says Bill. “None of them have
really chosen to do anything else.
“I’ve had serious conversations with
them individually and as a group as far
as, ‘Where do you want to go? Is this
what you want to do for the rest of
your life? Is there something else you
prefer?’”
All three say they are happy at Jack
Williams Tire.
“It’s something I’ve done since day
one,” says Scott, 33. “When I was 10 or
11, dad would drop me off at our ware-
house and I’d hop on the delivery truck
and we’d take loads to different stores.
“As I got older, I started to work in
the Kingston store. I learned to drive
on customers’ cars!”
Scott started full-time with the com-
pany in the early 1990s and started
working at the corporate office 10
years ago. “I come to work every day
and it’s a new experience,” he says. “I
can be on a collection call Wednesday
night and planning a sales blitz Thurs-
day morning.”
“Scott is a hands-on guy,” says Bill.
“He’s a great operations guy. He gets
involved with things. He works with
contractors and lays out stores.
“He’s great with numbers and does
most of our price grids and product

Continued on page 28...
Gas is 21 cents a gallon, the establishment of the Interstate Highway System is still 27 years away and Jack Williams Tire first opens its doors. For the last 77 years, Jack Williams Tire has never faltered on its commitment to customer service. That’s why it comes as no surprise that Bill Williams has been named the 2006 Tire Dealer of the Year, by Modern Tire Dealer.

Congratulations Bill, from all of us.
screens. He’s a back office, nuts-and-bolts guy.”

Two years ago, Bill promoted Scott to president of Jack Williams Tire. At the same time, he promoted Jason, 27, to executive vice president and Tracey, 30, to vice president.

Jason started changing tires for the dealership when he was 15 years old. He moved to the sales counter when he was 18.

“When I was in college, I worked full-time. I opened a few stores. When I graduated, dad said, ‘Let’s see if we can get some new things going.’”

Jason helped shape Jack Williams Tire’s automobile dealership supply division. He also created the company’s high performance division.

“Jason is a sales and marketing guy,” says Bill. “That’s his strength. Jason also is a motivator. He goes into stores and really fires up the managers.”

Tracey started working the retail counter at Jack Williams Tire while in high school. During college, she majored in education but switched to marketing.

“After graduation I said to dad, ‘I’ll look for a job,’ and he said, ‘Why don’t you come work in the business until you find something?’”

“In college I said, ‘I never want to work in the family business and I don’t want to work in an office,’ and here I am!”

“Tracey is a people person,” says Bill. “She does all of our public relations. She works with Stephanie, Scott’s wife, in handling our advertising. She likes going into stores and sitting down with managers to make sure we’re all on the same page.”

‘Market-makers’

Scott, Jason and Tracey all have contributed new ideas to the company. Perhaps the most successful has been the firm’s high performance shop in Kingston, which opened in 2003. Jason, in particular, was a driving force behind the idea.

“We felt we needed to do something to make us different,” says Bill.

Northeastern Pennsylvania is a far cry from Southern California, he admits. “But we saw a need for someone who specialized in performance.”

Jason and Scott visited a number of high performance shops in Florida and on the West Coast, and brought back ideas they could apply in Kingston.

The building, which had been a truck service center, was completely overhauled.

Service bays were installed and an attractive, modern showroom filled with...
AND HERE AT TOYO WE KNOW WHY

An unwavering commitment to customer service. Leadership. Integrity. These are the marks of a winner, and that’s why we are proud of our valued relationship with Bill Williams, Modern Tire Dealer's Dealer of the Year. Congratulations, Bill, and keep up the good work.

To join Team Toyo, call 1-800-953-8696
custom wheels, lift kits and other accessories was assembled.

Meanwhile, the decision was made to retain a more traditional area within the store for customers who prefer less exotic broad-line passenger and light truck products.

To make the store work, Bill knew his staff had to be experts in the performance field. They also had to be recognized as experts by customers.

“The tuner kids probably know as much or more about the products as you do. They do a lot of research and pretty much have in their mind what they want.

“The SUV guy — the doctor or lawyer who has the Tahoe or Escalade — doesn’t know a wheel from a brake or a rotor. He’s coming to us because we’re a well-known name. If he’s going to spend $5,000 or $6,000, he wants to feel comfortable.

“The guy who comes in with a Porsche or Mercedes has $100,000 in his car; he’s a fussy guy. He’s read all the magazines and wants someone to sit down with him for a couple of hours.”

To strengthen his high performance business, Bill purchased Auto Addictions, a major performance chain in the eastern part of the country, in 2003.

“Bill’s market is rural,” says Len Lewin, president and COO of American Car Care Centers (ACCC), of which Jack Williams Tire is a member.

“It isn’t Los Angeles or New York City, yet he was one of the first in our organization to put together a location that was geared toward high performance.

“In our business, when you draw people from five, six or seven miles, you’re doing a great job. Bill is drawing customers from 40 miles. He’s known as the authority in his area.”

“There are two things I think of when I think about Bill Williams: one, his leadership skills, and the other, innovation,” says Jon Rich, president of Goodyear’s North American Tire division.

“When you think about the things he’d done by bringing the tuner market and high-end tires to his own market... some people would’ve said, ‘That’s not a market where those products will be as popular as they are in Los Angeles or other places.’ But he’s proven you can market great products there, you can sell up and you can focus on specialty items.”

Jack Winterton, vice president and general manager, channel sales, for Goodyear North American Tire, has known Bill for 26 years.

“One thing that’s been as true today as it was back then is that Jack Williams Tire has been a market-maker. If the market goes to high performance, they seem to be one step ahead. In the light truck market, they seemed to move into SUV tires ahead of everybody else. I can’t emphasize enough how Bill is constantly thinking outside of the box.”

Bill explains the store’s success more matter-of-factly. “Everything I do is a return on investment,” he says. “I try not to come up with a pipe dream that’s impossible. That way when I go into something I go in with confidence.

“A lot of (tire dealerships) don’t follow through. Maybe things don’t happen as fast as they could or there’s a change in the economy, and all of a sudden they switch gears and do something completely opposite.

“Once you put a plan together you have to fine-tune it, but you have to stick with that plan.”

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Bank of America applauds our valued client, Bill Williams of Jack Williams Tire Company.

A note of congratulations from Commercial Banking. Your many accomplishments help define the industry standard.
Tough but fair
“When I turned 60, I decided I wanted to put my management team in place and let them run the company on
Continued on page 32...

Car count is king
Breaking into new markets, the Jack Williams Tire way
Jack Williams Tire Co. started with a single store in Kingston, Pa. The company now has 24 locations in several towns. There’s a science to breaking into new markets, says Bill Williams.
“If you open a store in an existing market, you’re in an altogether different situation than opening a store in a new market. If you open a store in an existing market, you’re known and you’re drawing your own customers. Really, you’re your own biggest competitor.
“If you go into a new market, every customer is a brand new customer. That means you have to steal from your competitors.”
Jack Williams Tire builds traffic in new towns by running teaser ads “that tell people we’re coming. We send out mailers with coupons.
“Car count is what it’s all about — and also what you do with those cars,” he adds. “I’ve seen stores have high car counts that don’t make a lot of money.
“And I’m not talking about over-selling. Our company policy is that if anyone is caught over-selling or selling a customer something he or she doesn’t need, they’re terminated on the spot. There’s enough legitimate work out there.”

Jack Williams Tire Co. has two dedicated alignment bays at its Kingston, Pa., store.
“You have to have a balance of ‘How do I grow? How do I innovate? But also how do I weather the down times?’” says Jon Rich, president of Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co.’s North American Tire division. “Bill Williams has always had the right balance.”

Drawing upon his experience, Williams recently shared his thoughts on the following hot-button topics:

**Car dealerships selling tires:** “We’ve always been a major supplier of tires to new car dealers, even though they weren’t as big a piece of the market as they are now. There’s no way we’re going to convince GM or Ford that they shouldn’t be selling tires. You have to accept that. If we decide we’re not going to supply car dealers anymore, somebody else will. The automobile manufacturers have made a commitment to be in the tire business.”

**Mass merchandisers:** “If you’re strictly running your company on price and you’re the lowest-priced guy in town, they’re your competitor. But that’s a tough business to be in. We can’t afford to have the cheapest price and be able to provide the service we want to provide. You have to put price and service together, and then you have value.”

On recruiting employees: “We’ve been unsuccessful with the final result of hiring employees from other tire companies. In most cases, we’ve had to re-train them. It’s easier to take somebody and train them our way rather than change their habits.”

On retaining employees: “They’re harder to satisfy financially because of the world we live in. The cost of living has gone crazy. They’re trying to survive. I can see where a young guy with a couple of children trying to survive on $10 an hour has a challenge. We try to show him, ‘You may start at $10 an hour, but you don’t have to settle for $10 an hour.’”

“I think it’s important that employees see opportunity at every level,” says Williams. “We encourage them to talk to people who have been working for us. They get to see that the person they’re talking to, who’s now an inside salesman, started as a truck driver.”

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a day-to-day basis,” says Bill. (Bill is 62 years old.)

He still enjoys supervising managers, hiring and motivating employees, and charting his dealership’s overall course.

Store visits occupy a fair percentage of his time. “When I visit, I want to visit as a friend — not ‘Oh no! Here he comes again!’ If I see a fellow who’s not doing what I think he should be doing, I’ll tell him. But 95% of the things (employees) do are right and good.”

Over-reacting is the biggest mistake a boss can make, he believes. “I’ve done it many times. You find out a guy meant well but just did the wrong thing. So I try to make sure I’m 100% sure of any situation before I go in and talk with a manager.”

One of the best ways to motivate employees, he believes, is to show them that they have a future at the company.

“When I hire somebody, I tell them, ‘All I can do is give you the opportunity, just like my father gave me the opportunity. What you do with that is up to you.’”

Bill also has been active with ACCC, which his company joined 14 years ago.

He served as the group’s chairman for a year and had to make some tough decisions during his term, including transferring production of ACCC’s American private label tire line from Michelin Americas Small Tires to Cooper Tire & Rubber Co. Jack Williams Tire also sells Goodyear, Kelly, Dunlop, Michelin, BF Goodrich, Uniroyal, Continental, General, Toyo, Nokian and Capitol brand consumer tires, plus Carlisle brand specialty tires.

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“We needed some new direction. But we got it converted to Cooper and at the same time salvaged our relationship with Michelin.”

“Bill came into the chairman position at a time when our organization had been in existence for 10 or 11 years...
and things had started to get just a little bit loose,” says Lewin, who worked closely with Bill during that period.

“One of the things Bill worked very hard on was bringing it back together — bringing back some unity and direction, and getting people refocused.

“He’s one of the strongest businessmen we have,” says Lewin. “He can analyze a situation extremely quickly and then decide what he’s going to do.”

The dynamics of supplier-dealer relationships continually change, but Bill says he’s maintained friendly relations with all of his tire suppliers.

“I can usually get to the person I need to if I see things aren’t moving the way they should.”

He says a number of suppliers have eliminated layers of bureaucracy in recent years, making it easier to get the answers he needs, “especially Goodyear. There used to be layers and layers. Five or six different people would have to sign off on something. Now you’re probably down to three. Michelin is the same way.”

Bill’s suppliers describe him as a tough negotiator, but also a fair one. “He’ll listen to you and give you the time you need to explain your situation,” says Michelin’s Hunt. “He’ll listen to where you’re coming from and clearly explain where he’s coming from.

“You can have difficult meetings with Bill, but he can separate the business part from the personal part of it. You can do your business and then put things aside and say, ‘Let’s move on to

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‘The small, single independent tire dealers who had two or three employees went by the wayside. They didn’t keep up with the changes.’
the next subject.’ And we start fresh. You don’t leave the table angry or upset with each other.”

“Bill is very tenacious,” says Goodyear’s Winterton. “He’s a tough negotiator. He’s not flashy and is very consistent in his approach. But there’s no question it’s been a very fair relationship over the years.”

Travis Roffler, marketing director for Continental Tire North America Inc., has known Bill for several years. “He treats his business relations like family. You really feel like you have a true partnership with him.”

However, sometimes past partnerships haven’t worked out, according to Bill, who has been forced to sever ties with some manufacturers.

“Sometimes it’s tough and sometimes you’re happy to do it because you have a bad supplier. That never bothered me… if it’s their fault, not mine.

“It’s like getting rid of a bad employee. I give everybody at least three chances. If I have to terminate an employee, I truly feel he’s had every chance in the world and just isn’t the right person for the job.

“If suppliers don’t give you 100% of their support and loyalty, then they’re not a good supplier. We realize suppliers have to make money. And they have to realize we need to make money. So we need honesty and have to make sure we’re on the same page.”

The thrill of independence

Unlike some of his peers, Bill Williams says there’s very little distinction between his personal life and his professional life.

“They’re one and the same. My employees are my friends, my suppliers are my friends and my customers are my friends.”

When Bill and his family sit around the dinner table, they talk tires. “That’s our thing. We enjoy doing it.”

Bill fishes and boats on occasion, “but I never had time for anything else. Running my business has been my hobby.”

However, one outside interest to which he devotes a lot of time and energy is community service.

Bill has quarterbacked several fundraising efforts, including working with Big Brothers and Big Sisters of America, to help underprivileged kids build and race Soap Box Derby cars.

“It’s $1,000 to get into the derby; that buys you a car. We went after the larger companies in our area for donations.”

Money raised beyond the cost of the car — some $10,000 — was donated to a local drug and alcohol abuse prevention program that focuses on kids.

The cars themselves were built at Jack Williams Tire’s Kingston store with help from the dealership’s service techs and managers.

The company also helped pay for the local derby’s winner to travel to the national championship in Akron, Ohio. “We still have the cars and we’ll do it again next year.”

Bill also supports the Volunteers of America, a group that administers

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Meals-On-Wheels and other charities. “It’s strictly for the elderly or people who have absolutely no income.

“We’re fortunate enough to have a great children’s hospital in our area, the Janet-Weiss Children’s Hospital. They do a lot of research on cancer and so forth. We’ve given to them. We’ve had occasions where some of our employees’ children have had to go there.”

Several years ago, the Williams family started the Sandi and Bill Williams Family Charity Fund, which gives money to various charities. The fund is administered through the Luzerne Foundation, an organization based in Wilkes-Barre.

“Sandi and I make a personal donation, as well as the company,” says Bill. “We earmark where we want the money to go.”

Jack Williams Tire, under Bill’s direction, also helped victims of the 9/11 World Trade Center bombings in New York City. After the attack, Bill closed his warehouse and donated trucks that carried food, water, clothing and other supplies to victims.

“We used our warehouse to sort the various commodities. We took 17 of our big vans.”

“Bill is always in the background, directing things,” says ACCC’s Lewin. “That’s just his personality. He doesn’t want to be front row center. He just wants to make sure things happen.”

What means more to Bill than anything else — including his business — is his family.

“They’re very family-oriented,” says John Peer, director, consumer dealer sales, Goodyear North American Tire. “They actually left one of our trips to come home early because it was Mother’s Day.”

“If there’s one thing about Bill, in addition to his business success, that impresses me, it’s his dedication to his family,” adds Goodyear’s Rich.

At an age when many people eagerly look toward retirement, Bill Williams says he’s having too much fun to step away from the business.

“People tell me, ‘You have to retire.’ I say, ‘I am retired! I’m down to 40 hours a week; I used to work 80.’ I can’t get any more retired than that.’

“The best thing about being an independent tire dealer is being independent.

“You can sit back and say, ‘We put it together ourselves and it’s because of what we did and the team we built that we’re successful.’

“The thing that can slow a business down the most is complacency. I don’t have time to be complacent. It’s always, “How can we top this?”

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Meet the judges

Anne Evans has been involved in the tire industry for 28 years as a retailer, wholesaler, retreader, importer, exporter, recycler and global consultant. She is founder and CEO of TYRES 2000 Ltd., a global tire reseller, and EER Ltd., a global scrap tire consulting business. She is a director of the Tire Industry Association (TIA) and chairman of its Global Council.

Russ Evans is a 20-year veteran in the global tire business specializing in recycling, importing and exporting, and financial management. He is chief financial officer of TYRES 2000 Ltd. and EER Ltd. For many years, in addition to his involvement in the tire business, he was a commercial real estate broker, developer and appraiser.

Dick Morgan has more than 40 years of multi-functional management experience. That includes 32 years in the tire and rubber industry, most notably as senior vice president of marketing for Long Mile Rubber Co. In 1989, he founded Morgan Marketing Solutions Inc., which provides marketing and management consulting and services to a wide variety of manufacturing, wholesale distribution, and commercial service firms. Morgan is a Certified Management Consultant. He can be contacted at rpmorgan@morganmarketingsolutions.com.

Larry Morgan owned Morgan Tire & Auto Inc., a 500-plus store dealership based in Clearwater, Fla., until selling a majority interest to the former Bridgestone/Firestone Inc. in 2001. The nationwide chain did business predominantly under the Tires Plus banner. He was president of TIA in 2004; that same year, he was inducted into the Florida Business Hall of Fame. Morgan was MTD’s Tire Dealer of the Year in 2001.

Saul Ludwig, an analyst covering the tire and chemical industries, is a managing director with KeyBanc Capital Markets, a division of McDonald Investments Inc., based in Cleveland, Ohio. He has been a regular contributor to Modern Tire Dealer for more than 30 years.

Congratulations
Bill Williams!