

# THE ROAD TO DAMASCUS

Meet DOUGLAS CAIN, the forward-looking CEO of Lake Truck Lines. BY: JIMMY PERKINS



**W**hen Douglas Cain speaks of his father, it is with a reverence and respect that leaves no room for doubt as to who shaped and formed him as a child, as a man and as a businessman. It was Joe P. Cain who founded Lake Truck Lines Inc. in 1949 in Houston and who subsequently gave Doug his first job.

June 1, 1966, was the day 13-year-old Doug was handed his coveralls and a broom and entrusted to the tutelage of the shop employees at Lake. Reverend Owens, Frank Davis, Isaiah Butler and Mr. Bass

assigned Doug all the worst jobs to be done and all the education he would need to understand his father's business at the shop level. As he progressed in age and experience, he learned the operation – in the shop, the office and the field, from crow's nest to keel and stem to stern. Joe Cain sold his company in 1977, but he kept the name – and that's all Doug Cain needed to carry on the family business.

Walking on to the South Texas headquarters of Lake Truck Lines today, you can see those early lessons, and many more, in full maturation. Lake Truck

Lines is an oilfield transportation company. That fact implies all the dust, dirt, mud and grease one's imagination can conjure. Imagine a fleet of trucks in and out of the oilfields of South Texas, and you can make certain assumptions about the condition of the equipment, the shop and the yard. In this case, however, those assumptions would be dreadfully wrong.

Lake Truck Lines is located on 10 well-kept acres just south of San Antonio, and you'd be hard pressed to find a more organized and efficient yard and shop in this industry. The

changed his outlook on his own role. Instead of thinking of himself as the owner of the company, he realigned his understanding that he was the steward of the company's assets. As he describes it, "That was my Damascus Road experience." It was a true conversion.

The recognition of this single fact prompted him to realize that he had a responsibility to be a better leader by empowering those around him. What followed was a long-term commitment to help all of his employees reach their maximum potential through a training program

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equipment is expertly maintained, and the diamond-shaped Lake logo stands tall on the trucks and tanks.

This attention to the smallest of details makes for a strong foundation, and it is why Lake has been handling work for some of the biggest service companies such as Halliburton and Schlumberger for the past two decades. Another reason for Lake's bedrock foundation is best described by Cain when he says, "We stay focused on the goal, not the 'shiny penny' syndrome. We haul cement and barite, and we provide the highest level of customer service possible."

This statement is specific to what Lake hauls, but not the extent of its business or its leader's vision. Cain is a forward-looking CEO. Recognizing the need for better equipment, he founded Lake Manufacturing, a subsidiary in Torreón, Mexico, and today, all of Lake's field bins, silos and trailers are manufactured at this plant. Not only does the location in Torreón offer a solution to improved equipment, it also positions Lake Truck Lines for the anticipated business in Mexico as a result of the energy reform laws recently passed. Furthermore, Cain has expanded his Texas operation into the Permian Basin and continues to grow in that area, as well as the Eagle Ford Shale, at a rapid pace.

However, the biggest change in the company occurred three years ago and it was nothing short of a tectonic shift in philosophy. Cain

called Lake University (see "Leaders Open Doors" on page 50).

Lake Truck Lines is committed to continuing education for its employees, both internally and externally. Currently, the company is covering the cost for two of its employees to attend UTSA. According to Cain, "We are a 64-year-old company, and we are just learning how to learn. I am proudest when I look at my employees and see them working so hard to be better. And I'm right there with them."

When you spend time with Cain, you can't help but walk away feeling that anything is possible. He has a positive attitude that inspires your imagination, but he also makes you understand that ideas are only as good as the actions that follow. To this particular point, he has a simple recipe for success: "If it is important, you will do it. If it is not important, you will not do it. Make everything important." That's a lesson he no doubt learned as a teenager operating a broom and as a CEO charting the way forward for his company.



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