

A man with a mustache, wearing a dark jacket, blue jeans, and a baseball cap, stands with his hands in his pockets in front of a blue Kenworth truck. The truck has "MARTIN SAUER" and "EAGLE RIVER, WI" written on the side, along with "KENWORTH 5" on the front. A black dog with a red collar is in the foreground. The background shows a wooded area with bare trees.

# Snorky Sauer

keeps those  
wheels rolling

# Martin Sauer, of Martin Sauer Trucking, Eagle River, Wisconsin GLTPA Member

By Jim Lundstrom

Eagle River, Wisconsin, trucker Martin Sauer has something in common with legendary crime boss Al Capone. Like Sauer, Capone was known to family and friends as “Snorky.”

History doesn’t record how Capone came to be called Snorky, but Sauer knows where he got his nickname. “My Mom gave it to me when I was a baby,” he said.

Snorky Sauer, his Kenworth rig and his dogs – first Ted and for the last three years, Annie, a mostly lab mixed breed – are familiar sights on the roads of northern Wisconsin and Upper Michigan, where he’s been hauling timber since 1990.

But Sauer’s truck driving and timber industry roots go deeper than the past 19 years.

“My father was in the logging business here in Eagle River, so, naturally, like everyone back in the ‘60s, every kid went to work with his dad,” he said.

Sauer started driving truck for others straight out of high school at age 18, and by 1980 he bought his first truck. “My wife’s uncle was in the over-the-road business. I had run a little bit with him. When I turned 21, opportunity knocked and we leased onto him for a couple of years. Then I leased onto a small company in Eagle River and ran all 48 states,” he said. Ten years of over-the-road hauling tends to keep a man from his growing family, so in 1990 when an Eagle River-based short hauler retired, Sauer bought a loader and took over the accounts of the retired trucker, so he could be home nights with his wife, Kim, and daughters Ashley and Jamie. Today Ashley is a mother and U.S. Army vet who served in Iraq and Korea, and Jamie is a senior studying biology at Lake Forest College in Illinois.

Sauer settled into the role of short-haul homebody and joined the Eagle River Fire Department, where he is a driver trainer. But the concept of a short haul has changed with the face of the industry Sauer serves. “When I started out a lot of my work was 25, 30 miles. Seventy-five miles was a long haul,” he said. “A short haul now is 75 miles. It’s just the way the industry goes. I went from hauling four loads a day to two and three. You’ll find me anywhere from Wisconsin Rapids to Marquette and Munising. The farthest I’ve ever gone, I took a load to Marquette and picked a load up about 50 miles from Mackinac Bridge.”

With more than three decades of driving under his belt, Sauer has been witness to amazing technological developments in his chosen field. “Since I started driving in the ‘70s, the improvements in the equipment, especially on the trucking side, have been phenomenal,” he said. “The truck I have now is exactly twice the horsepower of what I had in the mid ‘70s. No air conditioning. It had a radio, but you couldn’t hear it. It rode like crap. Now the

trucks ride so nice, you can hear yourself think. You get done at the end of the day and can be sociable.”

After increased horsepower, Sauer’s personal favorite among modern truck updates is anti-lock brakes. “In the ‘70s the technology just didn’t work,” he said. “When the sensors indicated that one of the brakes was about to lock, all the brakes would back off. It was terrible. They quit putting them on for 10, 15 years until they figured out the technology. Now it’s just the wheel that’s about to lock, it will release just that one. When they came back in the ‘90s, there was a lot of skepticism. People didn’t think they were going to work. Now I think they’re one of the finest features you can get for driver control. I think they’re great.”

Sauer’s long-distance driving experience in the 1980’s prepared him for the extra paperwork and legalities of interstate hauling between Wisconsin and Michigan. “Michigan trucks don’t like to come to Wisconsin, or can’t, basically. They run 11-axle trucks and they can’t bring them into Wisconsin,” he said. “A lot of Wisconsin guys don’t like going to Michigan because of the different laws and what have you. So it’s a little niche.”

Sauer admits being a Great Lakes Timber Producers Association member has helped him build that niche the old-fashioned way – by talking to people. “At Logging Congress I picked up some customers in the U.P. They knew one of the guys I was with and we got started talking,” he said. “GLTPA is a good networking tool. I think just about everybody I haul for now are members or are members of the Michigan Association of Timbermen.”

But he also recognizes the value of the association’s political clout. “The fact that we have a voice down in Madison helping with trucking issues and loggers with workman’s comp and other issues, that means they’re going to be in business longer, which means I’ll have business,” Sauer said.

When it comes to his trucking business, Sauer said Kim, his wife of 34 years, is an important part of the team. “Kim takes care of all the bill paying and book work. I take care of the fuel reports and billing,” he said. “That’s a key, to be perfectly honest with you. If it wasn’t for her, we’d be nowhere near along as we are.”

Sauer also gives a shout out to his trucker friends. “There are people I trust wholeheartedly without a problem,” he said. “We help each other out. They’ve got work and you don’t have any work, you help them and vice versa. There are some of us that work like that. That’s how everybody survives. We’d like to say thanks to all those who have helped us out over the years with a loaned part, an extra load, a late night pull out of the mud or just some good advice.” ▲