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Trucking Hopes to Stop Sex Trafficking With ‘Freedom’ Exhibit at Travel Plazas

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A traveling exhibit that raises awareness among trucking companies about domestic sex trafficking at truck stops and travel plazas is attracting a growing amount of attention in the industry.

Among those focused on publicizing the issue are three companies that recently sponsored an event for employees with the traveling exhibit — which is built into a dry van trailer — as its centerpiece.

The exhibit, called Freedom Drivers Project, was developed in August 2014 by Truckers Against Trafficking, a nonprofit group founded in 2009 that is supported with sponsorship from 48 trucking industry companies. The group’s mission is to educate trucking about human trafficking and teach fleets and drivers what they can do to fight it.

“We researched [causes] in the transportation industry and found human trafficking is just huge,” said Amanda Wilson, a marketing specialist with Red Classic Transportation Services, which operates a fleet and a brokerage firm from its headquarters in Charlotte, North Carolina. The company is a wholly owned subsidiary of and provides fleet services to Coca-Cola Bottling Co. Consolidated, also based in Charlotte.

Below, TT’s Dan Bearth asks Ron Drogan, president of Red Classic, about the role his company plays in efforts to prevent sex trafficking.



The two companies joined with McMahon Truck Centers — a dealership chain with six locations, including one in Charlotte — for a tour July 8-9 that took the exhibit to Red Classic’s corporate offices and then to two Coca-Cola Bottling Co. locations.

In those two days, 200 visitors saw exhibits that included a pair of shoes worn by a trafficking victim and a cellphone given to a woman by her pimp. The trailer shows videos and portraits of drivers who support TAT by working at training seminars, driving the trailer to showings or volunteering at events.

Wilson said Red Classic chose to bring the FDP to its site because the initiative is tied directly to trucking and also because the tone of the exhibit gets its message across without being “R-rated or jarring,” she said.

“[Red Classic] was so excited,” said Kylla Lanier, deputy director of Denver-based Truckers Against Trafficking. That’s what was cool, that they were so excited to share this with their employees and their community.

The exhibit had scheduled stops this year at the West Virginia Coalition Build, the Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance’s annual conference in Idaho, the Mississippi State Fair and the 2015 Justice Run, an event to raise money to combat trafficking.

TAT has done no advertising for the exhibit beyond maintaining a Web page and updating social media, but word is spreading, Lanier said. In fact, the group is getting more invitations for the exhibit than it can handle.

“It’s a one-of-a-kind exhibit, and I think it’s because of that we’re getting all this attention,” she said. “It’s unique in presenting the problem and the solution. It’s just taken off on its own.”

Lanier added, “Our goal, which we are exceeding, is to get [the exhibit] to two different locations every month.”

Along with the FDP trailer, TAT also offers training videos about the warning signs of trafficking, works with law enforcement to facilitate investigations, and hands out wallet cards with the hotline number for the National Human Trafficking Resource Center.

According to NHTRC data, just three truckers called the Resource Center’s hotline in 2007. The number of calls began rising in 2009, TAT’s first year in existence, and as of March 31 of this year, the hotline has received more than 1,100 tips from truck drivers.

“We’ll keep working with TAT by showing the informational CD in our training and passing out their wallet cards,” Wilson said. “We want to do more than just donate.”

In the case of suspicious activity or to ask for help, witnesses and victims can call the NHTRC hotline at 1-888-373-7888 or text the word “HELP” to 233733.

By Dana Pederson

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