



Owner-Operator's Business  
Association of Canada

Association professionnelle des  
routiers autonomes du Canada

*...from the  
director's chair*

## Just give'er

Like most Maritimers, I have a few vocabulary quirks that require some explanation. Like "give'er," for example, which is a useful turn of phrase when you're encouraging herring-chokers to git'er done. And if you want to see "give'er" in action, just ask a group of women to organize a series of convoys that combine celebration, education, and fundraising.

From one convoy in 2008, Convoy for a Cure has captured the imagination of truck drivers everywhere, and this year, four all-women truck convoys rolled across Canada in Ontario, Alberta, and New Brunswick. In three short years, these events have contributed the better part of one quarter of a million dollars to breast cancer research and awareness.

Women are organizing these convoys largely from behind the wheels of their trucks, with their families and friends pitching in thousands of volunteer hours to make the events efficient and effective fundraisers and impressive celebrations of women in trucking.

While united in their goals and objectives, each convoy is unique, depending on its location, who the organizers are, and what resources they have at hand. But in all cases, local businesses and industry suppliers have been generous in their financial support of the convoys, so that every penny raised by the drivers through pledges and donations goes to support breast cancer awareness programs and help fund research that is bringing us closer to a future without breast cancer.

Breast cancer is an obvious cause for women to champion – this heartbreaking disease continues to be the most common cancer among Canadian women. This year, an estimated 23,200 women and 180 men will be diagnosed with breast cancer and of those, 5,300 women and 50 men will die from the disease. On the upside, there has been a significant improvement in survival rates over the past decade, due in part to advances in screening techniques and treatment.

As with many types of cancer and other life-threatening diseases and conditions, early detection and treatment greatly increase chances of survival. More importantly, we know that good preventive maintenance, and lifestyle choices that improve overall health, can reduce the risk of becoming ill in the first place.

The way I see it, one of the most significant positive "side effects" of the pinked-out Convoy for a Cure events is that they're helping focus attention on wellness issues all drivers – women and men alike – face out on the road, from scheduling doctors' and screening appointments, to eating well and getting proper rest and exercise.

One of our members (male) approached me during the convoy celebrations in New Brunswick to tell me that after last year's convoy, he made a point of scheduling an appointment for a comprehensive physical – something he hadn't done for years. He was diagnosed with colorectal cancer, but luckily, with early detection, a good surgeon, and a successful recovery period, he's back on the road and doing fine. "That breast cancer convoy may just have saved my life," he told me.

The fact that we were even having that discussion, and that my friend was encouraging the other men who were listening to get themselves checked out, was somewhat unique. I mean, when's the last time you were at a truck stop and overheard a group of men and women truck drivers unabashedly discussing breast and colon health?

Another devastating disease that drivers are talking more about these days is diabetes. While it's always been on the radar screen because diagnosis and treatment of diabetes are closely scrutinized by commercial vehicle licensing authorities, drivers are becoming better educated about the lifestyle factors that may trigger Type 2 diabetes, a prevalent condition among commercial drivers. According to the Canadian Diabetes Association, the growth of diabetes in Canada is



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at epidemic levels. Numbers released by the association in September show that in Ontario alone, 1.2 million people are currently diagnosed with the disease.

While I haven't found any studies that show a disproportionate number of truck drivers are diabetic, just looking at the risk factors – which include high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and obesity – gives you some idea of where truck drivers might fit on the continuum. While there is no cure for diabetes, the good news is that people with diabetes can lead active, productive lives and even prevent complications if they are seriously committed to managing their condition. On top of that, many of the risk factors, like those mentioned above, can be controlled or eliminated.

Since November is National Diabetes Month, it might a good time to go to the Web site of the Canadian Diabetes Association ([www.diabetes.ca](http://www.diabetes.ca)) and check out their Healthy Living Series, a number of interactive learning modules that are chock-full of information on health and wellness. There's a nutrition section that would interest anyone living on the road – it includes tips for tasty and healthy menus and a guide for eating away from home.

Last month I wrote about the growing number of truck drivers who are making their own health and well-being a priority, and driver wellness is pretty high on OBAC's agenda, too. But drivers are only part of the equation. Carriers, as well as policy makers and regulators, are going to have to come to the table to ensure that our driving force is well enough to face the future. It's going to take all of us working together to git'er done.