

Waste collector in York County awarded National Industrial Driver of the Year

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While Jason Tavares ventured into an unlikely career, his drive for the job earned him the title of this year's National Industrial Driver of the Year by the National Waste & Recycling Association.

The award acknowledges his commitment not only to his job but also his desire to serve his York County community.

A 28-year employee of Yorktown Republic Services, formerly BFI, Tavares never thought he'd be driving industrial vehicles as a youth in Kailua, Hawaii.

"Truck driving was nowhere on my radar out of high school," he explained.

As it happened, Tavares came to Republic because he needed a career, something to do. He was hired as a temp and started working on the back of a waste management truck.

Still trying to figure out what his next steps were going to be, his father, a Republic driver, helped him get hired at the entry level.

"There, I was able to see the different lines of business and made it my goal to become an industrial driver," the son said.

He particularly liked the fact that the route was never the same and he had to be ready for whatever obstacles or challenges turned up.

"I liked how I could figure out how to run my route as efficiently as possible to be able to haul more containers," he added.

"Because I drive all lines of business," he said, "my schedule varies. My day typically starts between 2:30 and 6:30 a.m. and I'm usually working 10- to 14-hour days. I make sure that all routes are covered with drivers, then begin my own route."

Tavares works with a large team. There are more than 30 drivers ranging from commercial, residential and industrial to container and swing, along with mechanics and varied managers.

“I have open communication with all of them,” Tavares said. “Without them, nothing that I do would be possible.”

“Republic Services Yorktown means family to me,” he said. “When COVID began, a lot of companies were closing their doors. But Republic gave us lunches during the week and dinners to take home to our families.”

Refuse waste and recyclable material collectors are among the top 10 most dangerous jobs, according to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, and require highly skilled individuals who are keenly aware of safe operating driving habits.

That awareness is an integral part of the qualities National Waste & Recycling Association looks for when judging qualified drivers for its annual awards program.

“Republic nominated me for the competition, which honors member drivers who operate their trucks in a safe and responsible manner, have outstanding performance records and whose contributions have enhanced the overall safety and image of the solid waste industry,” Tavares said.

The award carries with it a cash prize and a new collection truck for Republic. While a definite distinction, equally an honor for him is being recognized for his dedication and service.

“Half the drivers here have seen me grow up, get married, have children and put them through college. And, I’ve seen them become parents and grandparents,” Tavares continued. “They are always there through losses and triumphs.”