

# CUTTING EDGE

How the industry's most advanced robotic welder is helping bring the **J&J** lineup

**B**efore the robotics manager leaves his J&J Truck Bodies & Trailers office at the end of the day, he makes sure that the robotic welder, which is believed to be the only system of its kind in the industry, is hard at work.

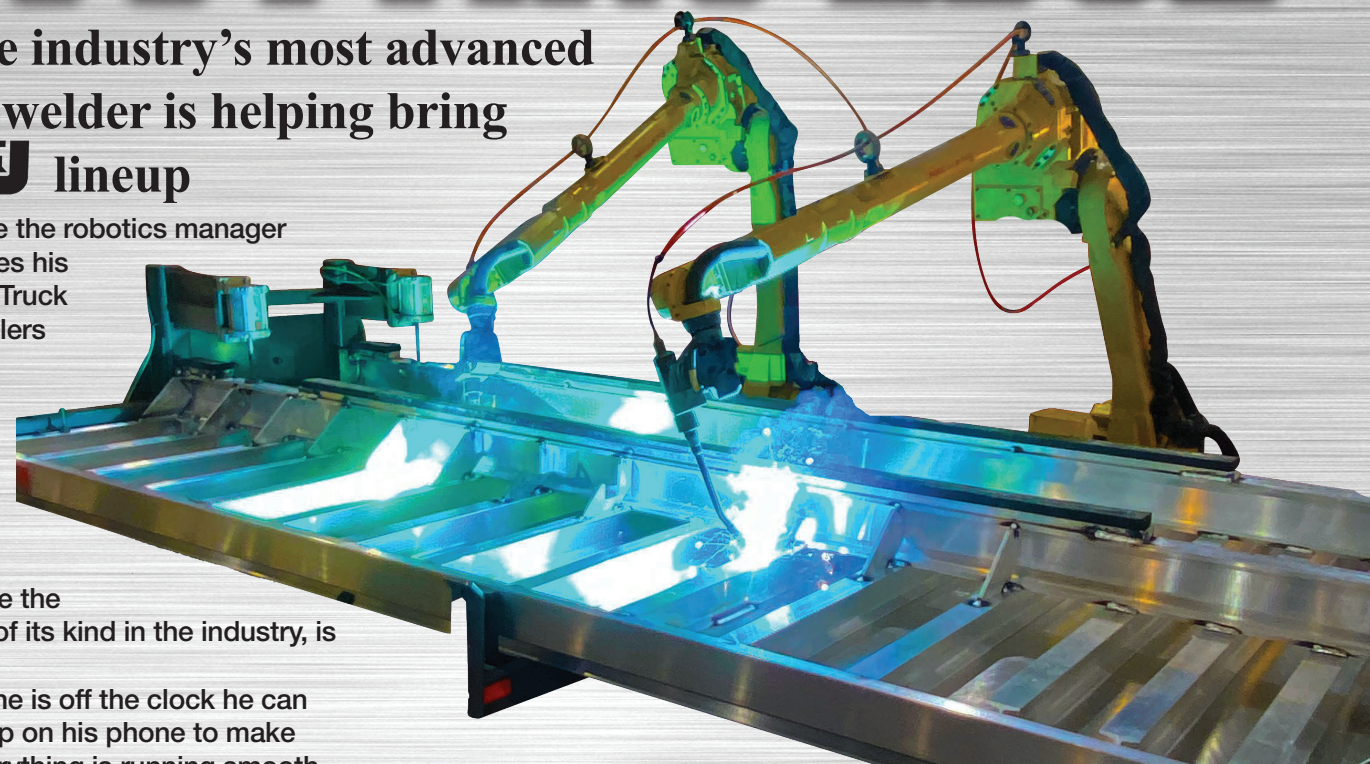
And when he is off the clock he can pull up an app on his phone to make sure that everything is running smoothly with the Fanuc Robot, which now produces underbodies and sides for dump bodies and will soon be welding tailgates.

Brian Kreger has a quarter century of experience in robotics, but he's never seen anything like J&J's robotic welder, which includes two stations that can custom weld a wide variety of products.

"To my knowledge there's no one in the industry using a robot to build their underbodies and sides," he said. "The underbody of a dump truck is like a snowflake. There are so many options out there that every body can be different with length, cross members and spacing. The program that we have is using parametric programming. It takes information and calculates it to determine where each part of the underbody should be. We use touch sensing to put the weld in the right location."

The cutting-edge technology at work in the J&J shop is benefiting employees and customers.

"One of the keys to putting these understructures on the robot is our engineering department," said Kreger, who has been working with



the J&J robotic welder since the design concept originated in 2018. "Instead of modeling every understructure, we can enter information into a program that creates the understructure drawing. The robot uses those same calculations to determine where the parts go."

The robot isn't replacing workers at J&J. In fact, it's getting input from the best welders in the industry.

"We're trying to grab all of that knowledge from the guys on the floor, who have been doing it forever, and automate it as much as we can to help move the product down the line," Kreger said.

In its first year of operation the robotic welder produced 111 underbodies and 215 sets of sides. With an estimated savings of five labor hours per underbody and two hours per side, those numbers add up quickly. The robot has saved J&J 80 days of labor this year.

The trailer side of J&J's operations also have benefited. The success of the robotic welder in the dump body plant has allowed J&J to shift the Gullco automated welder, which previ-

ously was used in in the production of dump bodies, to the trailer plant on the J&J campus. Not only did that free up space in the dump body plant, it also has streamlined operations in the production of trailers.

As the J&J team members have grown more familiar with the robot, they've been able to increase its workload and its capabilities. When it initially launched in June 2019, J&J only used the robotic welder for box crossmember beams.

Three months later the workload expanded to include I beam crossmembers, which opened it up to work for the Pennsylvania and Delaware departments of transportation.

Then came the sides, and the robot's repertoire could soon expand to include tailgate production. The innovation coming out of the J&J shop is intriguing.

"A lot of robots out there build one part or build different parts with the same one over and over again," Kreger said. "We're the only company that is doing what we're doing."

# The Long Hauler™

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With our new National Trailer Sales Manager

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Get the edge on winter

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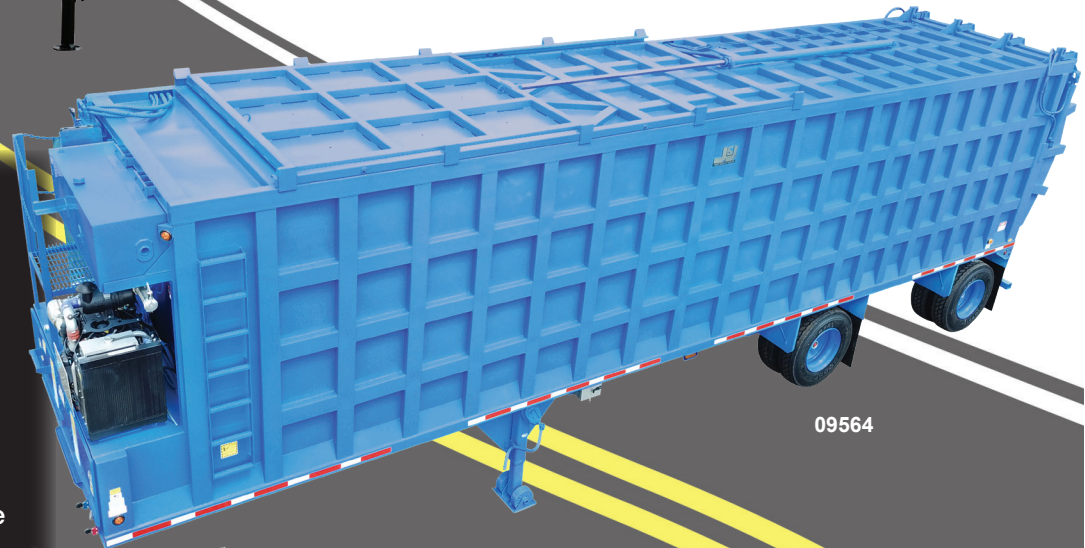


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## Employee Spotlight

# Former college athlete is ready to go to the mat for J&J customers



### Meet Nolan Link

**Position:** National Trailer Sales Manager

**Base:** Somerset, PA

**Phone:** 814-233-7868

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**N**olan Link knows what it means to be a member of a winning team.

Link, who joined J&J as the National Trailer Sales Manager earlier this year, wrestled in college for Division II powerhouse Pitt-Johnstown. He sees a lot of the same qualities in his J&J teammates as those who competed for the Mountain Cats' Pat Pecora, the winningest college wrestling coach in NCAA history.

Link has sales experience in Virginia, where he worked for a company responsible for waste disposal, trash collection, and recycling services. That background should prove invaluable with J&J's line of transfer trailers. He's also learning from two of the best in the business with Jason Cornell, J&J's Vice President of Sales,

and Tim Simpson, the company's Trailer Designer,

"The positive impact has been like going to Pitt-Johnstown," said Link, who grew up in Cresson, PA, about an hour from J&J's Somerset headquarters. "You go from one level as a high school wrestler to a room where you have some of the best wrestlers in the country. They take you under their wing, and they build you up. You're hitting a move wrong and they say, 'Hey, hit it like this.' I'm talking to a customer and Tim says, 'Did you ask them if it's corrosive?' Or Jason says, 'Did you ask why they want a dump trailer versus a walking floor trailer?'"

Link, who also played on the Pitt-Johnstown golf team, said there are parallels between his athletic and

professional careers. No matter how much guidance he gets from those around him, it will be up to him to put those lessons into practice.

"It's having a coach saying, 'Here's what you need to do to perform. Here's what you need to do to be the best,'" Link said. "That's Tim and Jason, 100%."

Those haven't been his only professional role models. Link's father, Steve, has successfully run a small business for nearly a quarter of a century and served as a guide on how to treat people. Link has seen how people have been helped his father's business and, in a few cases, how they have over-promised and under-delivered.

"A lot of customers, they don't want you to sell them," Link said. "They want a high-quality product, they

want someone who's going to advocate for them and someone that's reliable and available when they call them. That's what I'm trying to establish with all of my customers."

Building those relationships with customers can take time, and Link isn't trying to rush the process.

"I want customers to know, here's who we are, here's where we come from, here's what we believe in, and here's what we can do for you. I'm building that trust so that they know I'll do what you need me to do when you need me to do it," he said. "I'm the voice for the customer that's going to advocate for them during the manufacturing process. I want them to think 'He's going to make sure, if we run into a tough situation, I can rely on Nolan and he's going to get it

done.' Or, 'I know Nolan's going to be proactive and keep me updated.'"

The first chance to meet face-to-face with some potential customers will come in late June at the Waste Expo in Las Vegas. The show is Link's first with J&J and, for many in the industry represents the first time to attend a trade show since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020.

"I'm so excited," Link said. "I'm ready to meet people. I want to create relationships. I want to talk about J&J, who we are, what we value, and I want to talk to people about how we can help their business. I don't want to sell anything to anybody that isn't going to help them. I want to find the people who need the special applications that we manufacture."