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THE HAPPIEST CAPITALIST

**SHANE BOATRIGHT HAS ARRIVED.
HOPE EVERYBODY IS READY TO
ROCK AND ROLL.**

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THE HAPPIEST CAPITALIST

BY JOE O'DONNELL

Shane Boatright has arrived.

Hope everybody is ready to rock and roll.

He stirs it up—like the swizzle stick in a particularly intoxicating cocktail. Like the only celebrity in a room full of star-struck people, you tend to know that not only is Shane Boatright in the room, but what he’s wearing, what he’s doing, who he’s looking at.

“

I am 42-years-old,” Boatright says, “And this is not a dress rehearsal. This is the real thing. You are either go-

ing to be a spectator or you are going to be a player.”

Since starting his first business right out of college in 1989, Boatright has chosen to be a player.

“Every day I get to come in to one of my businesses, wherever I am, and people look at me because I am their leader. We have five companies under the Boatright name. Good leaders come in different forms. I am *Dante’s Inferno* meets *The Price Is Right*.

“Leadership for me is to keep it simple and humorous. I like to look at my people and let them know, folks, we may be lost but

we are way ahead of schedule.” Boatright says. “When you are leading your people, when you are showing them how we must bring the thunder, you have to be able to handle a lot of storms that come with it. It’s a long way to the top if you want to rock and roll. And it is a slippery slope. You’re not going to be there long because there can’t be but one rock star, everybody else has to be a roadie.”

From his suits to his rock-star hair to his ability to build a business, Boatright has developed a unique style in an industry not known for sexiness. “I am half-business man, half-entertainer, pro-railroad all the way. Every company I own and started is railroad-related. Ninety-nine percent of business is being able to work with people. All kinds of people, cause everyone is unique and different. Look at the people I employ. I’ve banded together an incredible cast of characters, because in business you have to be smart, but you have to be a good actor, too.

“Nothing we do is sexy. We manufacture

products for railroads. We maintain railroads. I own a railroad. The good thing about railroads in turbulent economic times, while no industry is recession proof, railroads are at least a little resistant to recession. Their stocks go down, loads and empties go down; but they haul the things we use up every day and that we always need more of.”

Railroads may not be sexy, but they are hot at the moment. No less a business icon than Warren Buffett bought all of Burlington Northern Santa Fe last month for \$44 billion. Buffett called his Berkshire Hathaway investment an “all-in wager on the economic future of the United States. Our country’s future prosperity depends on its having an efficient and well-maintained rail system.”

Boatright sees the same dynamic. “The green aspect of life and business will cause railroads to become a renewed vital source of distribution. Railroads are going to come back and enjoy a renewed focus. A diesel locomotive pulling 100 cars behind it burns one gallon of diesel fuel far more efficiently



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than a truck burning that same gallon—pulling one or two or, in California, three containers behind it.”

Shane Boatright began his career as a railroad industry entrepreneur fresh out of the University of Alabama. He started what is now Boatright Vegetation Management, LLC, in 1989 with one spray truck. “I was one man and a truck long before there were two men in a truck,” he says. “It looked like a pretty good gig, too. Six months out of the year you could work on that, the other six months you could take the money you made and chase women.”

Since then, Boatright has branched out into safety equipment sales, crosstie production and railcar repair and now owns a shortline railroad in southeast Georgia. “In any business you are in, keep your eyes wide open, and keep looking around for opportunities. One thing leads to another. As one company becomes profitable you get your money in

line, get your debts down. I just kept re-investing because I kept seeing other opportunities. In railroads, as in most industries, it is all about the bottom line. All railroads do is haul loads and empties. It is not rocket science.

“**A**s I moved through it, the greatest thing was seeing each company become successful. Now for me today, 20 years later, I thrive on seeing other people do well, whether you are a supplier to Boatright or you work for one of the Boatright companies. I am doing okay. Somebody said, ‘Boatright how do you know when you made it? I said, when you can spell subpoena without even thinking about it.’”

In 2000, Boatright secured an exclusive contract to sell crossties to the shortline in-

dustry, and since that year company revenues have expanded to 40 times their 1990s level. Under Boatright’s leadership, Boatright Companies has become one of the most well-known and trusted supply and service companies in the railroad industry. He is a regular guest speaker at industry gatherings, is active in governmental affairs within the industry, and has become in many ways the new, young face of railroad supply in this country.

According to Boatright, his proudest moment in the railroad industry was the day he first became owner of his own railroad. A lifelong passion for the industry and growth of Boatright Companies led to the purchase of St. Marys Railroad in 2007. The shortline railroad, which has been in constant operation since 1865, primarily services companies transporting paper products and items needed for the Kings Bay naval base, including ballistic missiles. The route runs from St. Marys

“I always told myself if I made it big in this business, it would not be about buying stuff ... it would be about adventure, cutting through, clarifying and capturing the true essence of what drives business and the people inside of it forward!”

—Shane Boatright



to Kingsland, Georgia.

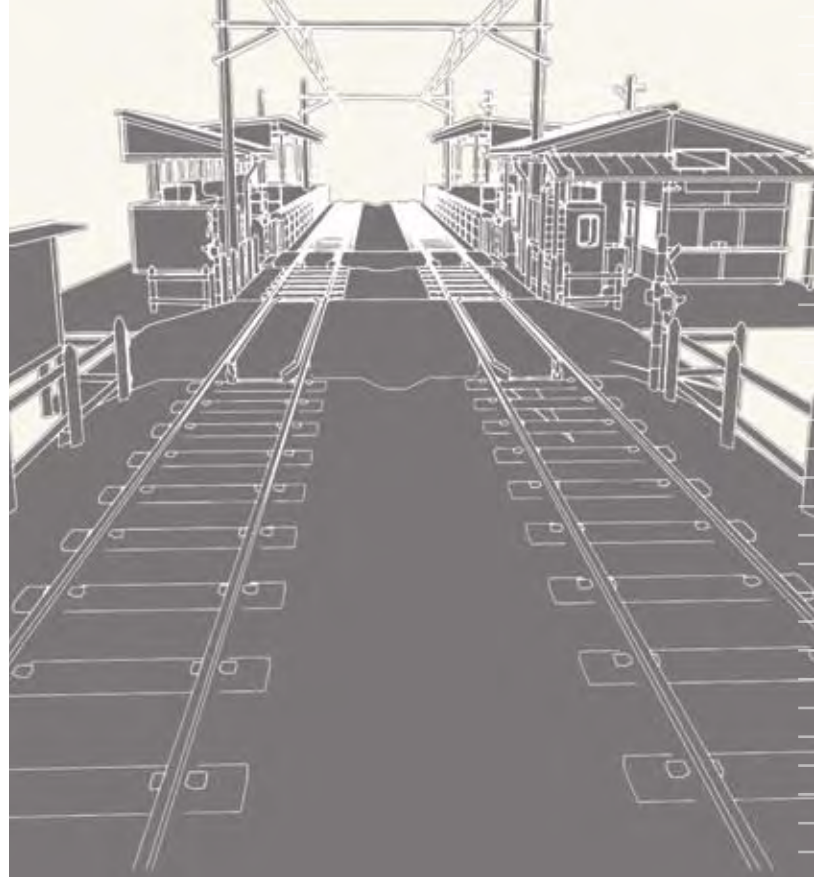
“It was a dream for me to own a railroad,” Boatright says. “but those things are expensive. After 17 years a railroad became available in Georgia. I had the privilege of meeting Tom Broughton of ServisFirst Bank. I showed up at his bank wearing a crushed velvet sports coat, my hair a little longer than it is now. He looked at me like I was crazy. I told him I wanted to buy a railroad, and

I needed a little help. The rest is history.

“The Kingsland Naval Base is a submarine base and we move ballistic missiles in and out of the naval base by rail. We have other customers too, but that is a real unique part of the story—doing something for your country,” Boatright says.

Boatright Cos. is trying to finalize a deal to build a new railway crossties plant in Chilton County by next year, eyeing a site in Chilton County Industrial Park, between Clanton and Thorsby, and planning a \$40 million investment on 70 acres. The company expanded its railway crossties business when it purchased Seaman Timber in Montevallo in 2008.

“My passion is seeing other people succeed. I am just a redneck from Alabama who had a vision and a dream, and I am living it. I don’t vacation well. I have a fancy car; hell, I have two cars. I always told myself if I made it big in this business, it would not be about buying stuff ... it would be about adventure, cutting through, clarifying and capturing the true essence of what drives business and the people inside of it, forward.” •



THE BOATRIGHT COMPANIES

Details: 200 employees operating in 26 states with offices in four states. No resignations in the past four years; never a violation with EPA, ADEM, OSHA or DOL in 20 years of operation.

Boatright Railroad Products

Manufactures, sells and distributes creosote and borate-treated crossties, as well as switch ties, tie plugs and bridge material to railroads of all sizes.

Boatright Safety Solutions

Specializes in high-end safety accessories such as vests, belts and equipment holsters. Accessories are made in the U.S. and custom designs are available.

HiRail Equipment

Sells and installs new and rebuilt HiRail equipment.

Boatright Vegetation Management

Provides comprehensive customized weed control along tracks, as well as maintenance programs for vegetation management.

Service Industrial Railcar

Offers full service repair in four Michigan locations, specializing in the repair and rebuilding of coal-carrying railcars.

St. Marys Railroad

Shortline railroad transports paper, as well as military supplies—including ballistic missiles—between St. Marys and Kingsland, Georgia.