

Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE BUS INDUSTRY

MOTORCOACH EXPO 2006



Industry takes to Tampa

Motorcoach Expo 2006 came to Tampa, Fla., last month and the city and the show exceeded almost everyone's expectations. Tampa attractions and facilities, especially its aquarium, were first rate. The Expo Solution Sessions were easily the best ever, judging by operator comments. Show attendance surprised many who had feared a drop-off from last year's door-busting Expo in Las Vegas. And the weather was Chamber-of-Commerce perfect. The show floor, above top, was steadily busy; Prevost Car unveiled its X3-45 coach (above left), and Elvin McMichael of Executive Coach in Lancaster, Pa. (smiling above right), won a Holland America cruise from MCI, presented by MCI CEO Tom Sorrells. Complete Expo coverage begins on Page 8.

'07 engines will boost price of new coaches by \$10,000-\$15,000

TAMPA — The new emissions controls required by the federal government for 2007 diesel engines shouldn't create any serious maintenance problems for the motorcoach industry, but they will boost the price of new coaches by several thousands of dollars.

That's the opinion of a panel of engine and coach manufacturer representatives who discussed the new requirements and their impact on coach operations at a workshop during Motorcoach Expo 2006.

The panelists said the much-talked-about diesel particulate filters that will be integral to the '07 emissions-reduction system on new engines will require extra maintenance, but the filters probably will

not reduce engine efficiency or create any new engine problems.

"It will be pretty much business as usual," suggested Roe C. East of Cummins. "We expect the overall impact to be very minimal."

However, operators will feel the pinch when they purchase new coaches with the filters and the other controls needed to meet the much-tougher emissions standards that take effect next year.

"They could add \$10,000 to \$15,000 to the price of a (new) coach," said panel member Brian Couch of Motor Coach Industries, noting that final figures will not be available until later this year.

No representatives of the other

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Sales of new coaches reach three-year high

Sales of new motorcoaches in the U.S. and Canada last year reached their highest level since 2002, *National Bus Trader* magazine reports.

A total of 2,058 new coaches were sold during 2005, representing a gain of more than 23 percent from 2004 sales of 1,668 units.

That means bus operators invested upwards of \$155 million more in new over-the-road buses last year than they did in 2004.

Just as significantly, 2005 marked the first year-over-year increase in new coach sales since the industry's banner year of 1998. In other words, it has been seven years since the industry posted back-to-back annual sales gains.

The sales figures for 2005 and

2004 compare to 1,771 new coaches sold in 2003 and 2,402 in 2002.

Sales in the final quarter of last year also were strong. In fact, the quarter's up-tick meant the industry posted sales increases for five consecutive quarters, when compared to the same quarter a year earlier. The sales upswing began in the fourth quarter of 2004.

A total of 663 new coaches were sold in last year's fourth quarter, an increase of 12 percent over 2004 fourth-quarter sales of 565 coaches.

Despite the good fourth-quarter showing, the quarter wasn't as strong as the first and third quarters when sales jumped more than 40 percent from the same quarters

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Evacuation contractor returns payment; worries mount

WASHINGTON — Landstar Systems, the Jacksonville, Fla., trucking logistics company at the center of the controversy over paying motorcoach operators for the evacuation of thousands of New Orleans residents after Hurricane Katrina hit in late August, has returned more than half of a \$59 million payment it received from the federal government for arranging buses for the movement.

The repayment of \$32 million came after federal auditors discovered that the Federal Aviation Administration made a partial

payment to Landstar for the evacuation work without having any documentation of the costs, according to a report issued by the U.S. Department of Transportation Office of Inspector General.

The FAA was asked about the paperwork on Oct. 13, three weeks after the payment was made, and Landstar was asked to provide the documents the same day. It sent the information about three weeks later, along with the refund check.

The report said the overpayment occurred because the initial contract was to supply 1,100

coaches at a cost of \$5,000 per bus per day, while the actual numbers turned out to be 400 buses at \$1,550 a day.

Henry H. Gerken, president and chief executive of Landstar, called the use of the word "overpayment" a mischaracterization, claiming it was part of an advance payment that turned out to be larger than what was thought to be needed.

"They asked for the money back and we returned it based on the cutback in tasks," Gerken told the *Washington Post*.

Landstar and three subcontractors that worked for the company — Carey Limousine, Bus Bank and Transportation Management Systems — have come under heavy criticism from motorcoach operators for not paying promptly for their evacuation work.

A number of operators say they still are owed thousands of dollars — in some cases, hundreds of thousands — for the work they did transporting people either before or after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Hurricane Rita struck the Texas Gulf Coast shortly after

Katrina came ashore near New Orleans.

There is widespread talk in the motorcoach industry that some operators may never see all of their money.

The most ominous story currently making the rounds is that one of Landstar's subcontractors made deals with operators for more buses that weren't needed or authorized, and it has run out of money with which to pay the operators.

Operators have resorted to all sorts of tactics, including hiring

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Mega-deal: CUSA to buy American Coach Lines

DALLAS — CUSA, the largest tour and charter motorcoach operator in the U.S., is buying the nation's fifth largest coach operation, American Coach Lines Inc. of Lake Worth, Fla.

CUSA announced late last month it had reached an agreement to purchase American Coach Lines, which also happens to be the biggest coach operator in the southeastern U.S.

Terms of the proposed deal were not disclosed but most certainly topped \$50 million.

American Coach Lines was created just over two years ago when a group of investors bought the motorcoach companies that made up the southeast region of Coach USA.

Among the companies acquired — that formed American Coach Lines — were such well-known operators as America Charters of Charlotte, N.C.; Southern Coach Co. of Durham, N.C.; American Coach Lines of Norcross, Ga.; Gray Line of Fort Lauderdale; American Bus Lines

of Miami; Tippet Travel of Florida, and Dillon's Bus Service in Millersville, Md.

At one time, those companies were owned by such well-known industry executives as Louis Wade Jr., Billy Ray Rhyme, Calvin Cooper, Michael Gaddis, Marie and Charles Tippet, Louis Cicerone and the Dillons, Ron, Keith and Brian.

When Coach USA sold them, the companies were among the better performing Coach USA operators. The region had sales of \$49.8 million in the 12 months ended April 30, 2003, with an operating profit — before goodwill amortization — of \$5.8 million. That calculates out to an operating margin above 11 percent, and that was during a period of industry stagnation, resulting from the then-lackluster economy, depressed travel sector and after-effects of 9/11.

The New York investor group that assembled American Coach Lines paid \$48 million for the companies. The purchase included eight operators in Maryland, Georgia, North Carolina and Florida.

Today, American Coach Lines operates in 13 markets and under a half-dozen brand names:

- Midnight Sun Tours, West Palm Beach, Fla.
- American Coach Lines, Miami/Fort Lauderdale, Orlando and Jacksonville, Fla.
- Cruise Connection, Sarasota, Fla.
- American Coach Lines, Atlanta (the Atlanta operation holds a Gray Line franchise)
- America Charters, Charlotte and Winston-Salem, N.C.
- Southern Coach Co., Raleigh-Durham, N.C.
- American Coach Lines, Jacksonville, N.C.
- Dillon's Bus Service, Balti-

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Issues combined; see new Web site

Because of Motorcoach Expo 2006, the production schedule for *Bus & Motorcoach News* was discombobulated. Consequently, the Feb. 1 and Feb. 15 issues are being combined into this issue.

The next issue will be the March 1 edition.

If you get restless waiting for your next *Bus & Motorcoach News* fix, visit our dandy new Web site and check it out. Go to: www.busandmotorcoachnews.com. You must be a member of the United Motorcoach Association to fully access the site. If you aren't a UMA member, you now have another good reason to join.

Court okays reorganization of Blue Bird

FORT VALLEY, Ga. — Blue Bird Corp., North America's most-diversified bus manufacturer, has completed its second financial reorganization in 15 months.

This time, however, the company had to get a bankruptcy court involved to get approval for its reorganization plan.

The Chapter 11 bankruptcy filing by Blue Bird became necessary because of the company's deteriorating financial condition and its failure to get unanimity among its banks for the plan it proposed for overhauling its debt.

For most of this decade, Blue Bird has suffered from reduced bus buying by financially strained school districts, plus a number of costly problems stemming from a plant closing in Iowa.

Consequently, Blue Bird hasn't been consistently profitable, meaning its cash situation deteriorated and it couldn't cope with its huge debt load.

When Blue Bird was restructured in Oct. 2004, it ended up with \$215 million in long-term bank debt. That amount has only been reduced by \$2 million in the interim. In addition, Blue Bird has roughly \$129 million in unsecured debt and \$53 million in trade debt.

Other financial obligations include \$41.5 million in unfunded pension commitments, \$14.1 million in outstanding warranty claims, and \$8.4 million in accrued wages and employee benefits.

There's always one

As it did '04, Blue Bird tried this year to reorganize its finances outside of bankruptcy court but because one of its banks didn't like what was being proposed it wasn't able to pull it off. It was forced to ask a bankruptcy court for protection. It picked the U.S. Bankruptcy Court in Reno, Nev.

While restructuring negotiations were underway late last year and early this year, the company financial situation continued to weaken, becoming so dire last month that it was forced to suspend manufacturing operations, telling employees to stay home.

Ultimately, Blue Bird said that the holders of 93 percent of its debt approved the reorganization plan that was approved by the bankruptcy court.

The plan the debt-holders agreed to includes debt-for-equity conversion plan that will turn a portion of the debt the banks hold into more stock in the company,

reducing the amount of debt on Blue Bird's balance sheet and overall strengthening its financial position, the company said.

Additionally, the banks agreed to increase the amount of money Blue Bird can borrow by \$52.5 million through a new-and-expanded loan agreement.

The bank consortium currently owns 42.5 percent of Blue Bird's stock. Another 42.5 percent is owned by Volvo AB, the giant European-based bus, truck and engine manufacturer; 10 percent is held by Blue Bird management, and a British pension fund owns the remaining 5 percent.

Volvo says no

Late last year, Blue Bird management and its banks tried to get Volvo to buy out the banks and recapitalize the company. On Jan. 2, Volvo said "nej."

Separately, Volvo announced last month it was writing down the value of its investment in Blue Bird by \$71 million.

The reorganization plan also provides for a full payoff of the company's general unsecured creditors and for continuing to operate on a "normal basis."

However, the company cautions

that its bankruptcy filing could adversely affect its relations with dealers, customers, employees and suppliers, and that it may have been harmed by having to shut-down operations while it was trying to put together a restructuring plan that would win everyone's approval.

Nevertheless, company President and CEO Jeffrey Bust remains upbeat.

"We are going to take full advantage of the opportunities this restructuring plan provides Blue Bird," said Bust. "With the new financing this plan provides, the hard work of our employees, and the ongoing commitment of our suppliers and distributors, Blue Bird will remain one of the world's leading school bus and motor home manufacturers for many decades to come."

Not giving up

Bust said the company will focus its full attention on strengthening business operations, improving its financial performance, improving its products, and providing the best in customer service.

The company is committed, it says, to meeting new bus delivery schedules and maintaining its



Jeffrey D. Bust

standards of quality and service.

"We are very grateful for the flexibility and cooperation shown by our senior lenders over the past few months," said Bust. "Their support is a vote of confidence in our business model, our superior products, our excellent management team, and our bright prospects."

For much of the past two years, Blue Bird has been working to turn its manufacturing operations profitable. That hasn't happened yet, and the company doesn't expect to see an operational turnaround until next year.

Annual sales at Blue Bird are roughly \$700 million and it manufactures about 30 percent of the new school buses sold in North America. It employs nearly 1,900 people at plants in Ft. Valley and Lafayette, Ga., and Brantford, Ont.

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THE DOCKET

Biodiesel industry gains time to fix quality issue

ST. PAUL, Minn. — Minnesota's drive to require biodiesel fuel in all diesel-engined buses and trucks operating in the state hit another bump last month when a suspension adopted in December was extended by another month.

A 21-day waiver of the state biodiesel law was extended until late this month in an effort to iron out fuel quality problems.

The December shutdown was the second in the first three months of the program.

Proposals for what are being called "a tough quality-control program" also were unveiled. The National Biodiesel Board and the Minnesota Biodiesel Council asked the state to consider adopting tighter fuel-production controls.

The groups want to make the accreditation of biodiesel plants mandatory, and for the state to require that every shipment of biodiesel earn a certificate for meeting state standards.

Poor batches of the soybean-based fuel are blamed for clogging diesel-engine fuel filters around the state. The emergency shutdown of the program in December was extended into this month because poor-quality biodiesel may still be lurking around the state.

"We take biodiesel fuel quality extremely seriously," said Joe Jobe, chief executive of the National Biodiesel Board.

"We appreciate the willingness of the all parties — especially biodiesel producers — to work on solutions that will ensure that this valuable, renewable fuel is a part

of the Minnesota marketplace," said Minnesota Deputy Commerce Commissioner Edward Garvey.

Minnesota is the only state to require that all diesel fuel contain at least 2 percent of soybean-based biodiesel. The law took effect in late September, but two rounds of quality issues have unsettled supporters.

Preliminary tests show that some batches of biodiesel contained high levels of glycerin, making it vulnerable to gelling in cold weather, and clogging fuel filters. Industry officials can't say how widespread the problem is, or where the bad batches came from.

N.Y. eyes biodiesel

ALBANY, N.Y. — New York Gov. George Pataki wants his state to have a string of biodiesel and ethanol fueling stations.

The governor decided to include a line item in the state's 2006-07 budget calling for the alternative fuel stations.

Pataki's office said the measure represents decisive action to cut New York's rising fuel bills and to protect the state environment by reducing dependency on foreign oil.

The plan calls for 27 service stations offering the fuels along the New York State Thruway and an additional 100 service stations statewide.

Pataki also wants ethanol and biodiesel refineries established in the state.

Economic indicators rise

WASHINGTON — To key economic indicators that motorcoach operators watch continue to climb.

U.S. consumer sentiment rose for a third straight month in January, according to the University of Michigan's monthly consumer sentiment index.

The index rose to 93.4 from 91.5 in December. The reading was above economists' expectations of a 92.5 reading.

The expectations index, which often foreshadows consumer spending, rose to 81.5 from 80.2 in December.

The survey's current-conditions index, which reflects consumers' attitudes on whether it's a good time to buy, also rose, to 112

from 109.1 in December.

Meanwhile, the index of U.S. leading economic indicators rose for a third straight month in December, but the 0.1 percent rise pointed to potentially slower growth.

The December gain followed a revised 0.9 percent rise in November, the New York-based Conference Board reported. November's increase had originally been reported as a 0.5 percent increase.

The leading indicator index, which measures the likely performance of the U.S. economy over the next three to six months, is watched by coach companies because it forecasts activity for the next three to six months.

Transits seek charter firms

The following public transit providers have informed the United Motorcoach Association of their intent to provide charter bus service unless willing and able private operators step forward to offer service or to bid on contract opportunities.

UMA urges appropriate operators to take the time to respond to these notices:

Corpus Christi, Texas. Deadline: 3 p.m. Feb. 3, 2006. Write to: Lamont Taylor, Regional Transportation Authority, 5658 Bear Lane, Corpus Christi, Texas 78405. Phone: (361) 289-2712.

Clemson, S.C. Deadline: Feb. 10, 2006. Write to: Clemson Area Transit System, P.O. Box 1566 (1201 Tiger Blvd., Ste. 2), Clemson, S.C. 29633. Phone: (864) 653-2030.

South Bend, Ind. Deadline: Feb. 13, 2006. Write to: Mary McLain, General Manager, South Bend Public Transportation Corp., P.O. Box 1437 (901 E. Northside Blvd), South Bend, IN 46624.

Johnson City, Tenn. Deadline: Feb. 21, 2006. Write to: Donna Bridwell, Johnson City Transit Systems, 137 W. Market St., Johnson City, TN 37604. Phone: (423) 929-7119.

Canada to try speed limiters

TORONTO — An interesting debate is occurring in Canada over a proposal to require mandatory "speed limiters" on over-the-road buses and trucks.

Government officials across the country say they will save fuel and reduce emissions.

However, a Canadian motorcoach industry executive said the real reason bureaucrats want the limiters is because "they can't enforce the speed limits."

Support for a national policy on the issue is reportedly building among Canada's provincial trucking associations.

No truck or bus in Ontario would ever travel faster than 105 km an hour — about 65 mph — under a plan proposed by the Ontario Trucking Association.

The truckers have yet to formally ratify a position on the use of limiters. But one group said it has been receiving "encouraging news from its federation members."

Federal officials unveil new traveler document to ease border crossing

WASHINGTON — Bowing to pressure from President Bush, the Departments of State and Homeland Security have unveiled a new travel document for Americans who frequently travel back and forth between the U.S. and Canada and Mexico.

The proposed travel credential would be credit-card sized and less expensive than a passport, but it would serve the same purpose for Americans crossing the nation's northern and southern borders.

Michael Chertoff, secretary of Homeland Security, said the new card will be "like the kind of driver's license or other simple card identification that almost all of us carry."

Presumably the new card would satisfy Congressional demands that everyone entering the U.S. carry a secure identity document beginning Jan. 1, 2007.

In announcing the proposed document, Homeland Security officials indicated the card may contain a computer chip encoded with biometric data such as fingerprints and would be resistant to counterfeiting, but the department has made no final decision whether to include a computer chip or what other information should be included on the card.

The federal government will seek public comment later this year on the card, as well as the

government's overall timetable for requiring more secure IDs for Americans traveling between the U.S. and Canada and Mexico.

Last September, the government asked for comments on a plan that would require passports beginning Jan. 1, 2007, for those arriving by air and sea, and Jan. 1, 2008, for those arriving overland.

That plan caught flack from not only local chambers of commerce but also national organizations, including the United Motorcoach Association, and ultimately the president. Bush ordered a review of the timetable and passport requirement. Many organizations object to requiring passports as security documents because they are bulky, expensive and time consuming to obtain.

The card proposed by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Chertoff at a press conference last month would be inexpensive and — in effect — little more than an enhanced driver's license.

Currently, Americans need only a driver's license or birth certificate to return to the U.S. from Canada and Mexico. Both documents are considered easy to counterfeit and some stated even issue driver's licenses to nonresidents.

Two years ago, Congress instructed the Homeland Security and State departments to require a passport or other secure document.

OSHA exempts small firms

WASHINGTON — Small bus operators are exempt from a federal requirement that employers report and post a summary by April 30 of all job-related injuries and illnesses that occurred last year.

The U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration is requiring companies with more than 10 employees to complete OSHA Form 300A between Feb. 1 and April 30. The form tallies job-related injuries and illnesses, the average number of employees and total hours worked during the year.

Small coach fleets are exempt, said OSHA spokesman Frank Meilinger. "They are only required to report if they have any fatalities or if the Bureau of Labor Statistics asks them to participate in its annual survey," Meilinger said.

Companies required to com-

plete the form, but had no recordable injuries or illnesses last year, simply enter zeros on the total line. All summaries must be certified by a company executive.

A copy of the report should be displayed in a common area wherever notices to employees are normally posted. Copies must be available to employees who move from worksite to worksite and employees who report to no fixed establishment on a regular basis.

Copies of Forms 300, 300A and 301 are available at www.osha.gov/pls/publications/pubindex.

All employers, including those partially exempted by reason of company size or industry classification, must report to OSHA any workplace incident that results in a fatality or the hospitalization of three or more employees.

Industry faces real dichotomy

The two articles on the front page — about the 2007 engines and the jump in coach sales last year — certainly are reflective of the industry's two faces today.

The worst of the industry's protracted economic slump appear over, but there's still plenty of uncertainty, especially regarding the '07 engines.

As UMA President & CEO Victor Parra said in opening Motorcoach Expo last month, many operators report their companies are doing better. For more than a few, 2005 was an exceptional year.

At the same time, the introduction of the low-emissions engines next year has scores of operators, and their maintenance chiefs, worried.

The memory of the dismal performance of some post-2002, EGR-equipped diesel engines is still fresh, and no one wants to see a repeat next year.

The engine builders generally expect far fewer problems with the '07 engines, than the '02 models, because they have had much more time to prepare this time around.

That is comforting but everyone would feel a whole lot better if hundreds of the engines had been operating in fleet tests for the past few months to back-up the assertions. That hasn't happened yet, but the tests reportedly are coming.

Meanwhile, operators are likely to do what they always do when there is uncertainty, rising prices, and higher operating costs — extend trade cycles or pre-buy. So, a year from now, *Bus & Motorcoach News* may have a new front-page story — about how great coach sales were in 2006.

Operators try new roads, find new business

TAMPA — Motorcoach operators who want to grow their businesses might do well to think "out of the bus."

That strategy paid off for four operators who told their success stories at a Motorcoach Expo 2006 workshop on finding new business opportunities.

The four decided to try something different than their usual charter business and what they found has helped boost their bottom lines.

Todd Holland of Ramblin Express in Colorado Springs won a contract to become the passenger transportation provider for one of the nation's best-known resorts; Gladys Gillis of Starline Transportation in Seattle developed a corporate shuttle service; Gary Krapf of Krapf Coaches in West Chester, Pa., started a sunshine service — hauling people and their cars — to Florida, and Larry Benjamin of Northfield Lines Inc. in Northfield, Minn., purchased a small travel agency that specialized in tours and cruises.

Each of them say they experienced serious ups and downs in launching their new products, but they rode out the bumps and now consider their ventures worthwhile.

And, they learned a lot about expanding into new areas.

"From the outside looking in, the limousine business looked the same to me, but it wasn't," noted Holland. "The clientele is unforgiving and they demand a lot."

Holland's new business opportunity developed when the



Todd Holland



Gary Krapf



Larry Benjamin

Broadmoor Hotel in Colorado Springs decided to outsource the shuttle service for its upscale guests. "We knew we could provide them with first class service," he said.

Providing the highest quality service to a five-star resort proved to be a challenge. Ultimately a new culture developed within Holland's company, helping transform his business into a first-class transportation company, providing service equal to the Broadmoor's guests.

Gillis went after corporate shuttle business to get better utilization out of her fleet and after discovering that only a few businesses — some of them parking lot owners — were offering the service, and none of them was doing a very good job. "They were not proactive and they had different vehicles and drivers all of the time," she said. "We sold our customers on providing the same drivers and the same vehicles" everyday.

Krapf said developing a sunshine service — busing retirees and others to sunny Florida when the weather turns cold and return-

ing them home when it warms — initially was an effort keep busy during the slow winter season. "We were just trying to fill the void that we have in the winter," he said. "Then we found that the service was not being offered in our area and we had a captive audience."

Benjamin said he noticed that his regular charter customers were always looking for new places to visit and for new adventures. "We surveyed them and found out they were looking for fun and we just figured they would enjoy going on cruises," he said.

Gillis and Krapf had to invest very little in capital startup costs because they were able to use their existing buses and coaches for their new services. Holland, though, spent money on small buses, vans and limousines to get started, and Benjamin bought an existing cruise and tour agency.

While Gillis and Krapf caught breaks with capital expenses, both had to deal with unfamiliar problems.

Krapf said he had to work deals with car carriers for cus-

tomers who wanted their vehicles with them when they got to Florida, and arrange hotel rooms and restaurant stops for travelers making the overnight trips.

Gillis said she quickly discovered that drivers consider shuttle work boring and they would rather pass on the assignments. The company now holds weekly meetings with drivers so they can communicate their concerns and better understand the nature of the business, and monthly meetings with regular customers so they can learn of their needs.

Marketing has been a little different, too.

Krapf said he spent about \$100,000 marketing the sunshine service, including purchasing media advertisements and billboards and producing newsletters. However, he found that the best marketing tool was sending out a sales person to social and civic activities and knocking on doors at senior living centers. "Direct sales are what worked best for us," he added.

Benjamin said marketing has not been too difficult or costly for him because most materials are provided by cruise lines, which also pay him a 15 percent commission for each booking. He does limited print advertising, radio spots and Internet advertising from time-to-time. "And we don't have to worry much about pricing because it is done by the cruise companies," he said.

The new business opportunities session was moderated by UMA President & CEO Victor Parra.

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		Michelle Silvestro National Interstate Insurance Co. Richfield, Ohio
		T. Ralph Young Young Transportation Asheville, N.C.

DOT Inspector General Mead is leaving

WASHINGTON — Kenneth Mead, who has served as inspector general of the U.S. Department of Transportation longer than anyone else, is leaving this month after being on the job for almost nine years.

Deputy Inspector General Todd J. Zinser will serve as acting inspector general until a successor is appointed. Mead departs Feb. 11.

Congress created the position of inspectors general in 1978, and charged them with rooting out government waste and fraud.

The last half of Mead's tenure was the most tumultuous in U.S. transportation history as the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks fundamentally altered commercial aviation and federal policy toward the industry. The changes elevated his position and prompted investigations into finances, safety and aviation security.

Mead, whose office works independently of Department of Transportation policymakers, also conducted aggressive investigations of the deteriorating financial prospects of Amtrak, as well as wasteful spending and management practices at Boston's Big Dig highway and tunnel project.

More recently, Mead's staff has been investigating transportation contracts in connection with Hurricane Katrina disaster relief, including those involving buses used to evacuate residents of New Orleans. (See story on Page 3.)

Mead's conclusions and testimony often carried weight with lawmakers in Congress, where he was respected by both Republicans and Democrats.

\$800 million-plus going to rebuild Gulf Coast roads

JACKSON, Miss. — The Gulf Coast states will share \$868 million in federal money for road and bridge projects, U.S. Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta announced late last month.

Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas and Florida will use the money to repair or rebuild federally supported highways and bridges damaged by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita at the end of last summer.

Mississippi will receive \$740 million, the lion's share of this most recently announced appropriation. Louisiana will receive \$75 million, Florida \$42 million and Texas \$11 million.

Mineta said the funding amounts were based on state requests. Additional money most assuredly will be requested and distributed, Mineta noted.

The funding is part of a \$2.75 billion emergency relief package requested by President Bush and approved by Congress late in 2005.

"The opportunities to see positive outcomes and results for the traveling public and taxpayer have been enormously satisfying," Mead wrote in his resignation letter to President Bush. He also praised his staff for having a steady moral compass and the determination to protect taxpayers' interests.

Transportation Secretary Nor-

man Mineta, whose department heads sometimes chafed at Mead's reports, said taxpayers are losing a fierce ally.

"Ken has been a tireless advocate for setting the highest possible standards of integrity, accountability and performance," Mineta said in a statement.

Mead was appointed in 1997 by then-President Bill Clinton.

DOT attorney to head NHTSA

WASHINGTON — President Bush has nominated Nicole Nason to be the administrator of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

An attorney, Nason, 35, is an assistant secretary for governmental affairs at the U.S. Department of Transportation.

She was previously with the

Customs Service and was communications director and counsel for CIA Director Porter Goss when he was a Republican congressman from Florida.

The previous NHTSA administrator, Jeffrey Runge, a medical doctor, left the agency last July for a top position with the Department of Homeland Security.

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New coaches

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

in 2004.

The top five-selling coaches in the fourth quarter were the MCI J4500, MCI D4500, Van Hool C2045, Prevost H3-45 and Setra S417. Rounding out the top seven were the MCI D4000 and the MCI D4505, a revamp of MCI's D-model that the company unveiled early last year.

New coach sales in Canada slumped in the fourth quarter. Only

2.5 percent of the total went to Canadian operators. Typically, new coach sales in Canada represent between 7 and 11 percent. Third-quarter 2005 Canadian sales were 7.5 percent of the total, and Canadian sales accounted for 9.7 percent of the total in the fourth quarter of 2004.

The percentage of new coaches equipped with Allison B500 or ZF-AS Tronic transmissions shifted slightly during the fourth quarter of last year. Sixty-six percent of all coaches sold in the fourth

quarter had Allison automatics, while 33.3 percent were equipped with the AS Tronic auto-stick shifters. In the third quarter, more than 70 percent of the coaches had Allison units.

"It should be noted," said *National Bus Trader* Editor Larry Plachno, "that the AS-Tronic transmission has not yet been offered in conversion shells. Hence, the percentage of AS-Tronic transmission in seated coaches (sold in the fourth quarter) is 37.9 percent."

Plachno also pointed out that the ZF is more popular in certain model coaches than others. For instance, it was installed in at least half of the MCI D4005, D4505, MCI E4500, H3-45, Prevost LeMirage XL II, C2045 and Van Hool T2145 models sold in the fourth quarter.

And, for the top-selling J4500, two coaches were delivered with ZFs for every one equipped with an Allison.

A total of 77 conversion shells were sold in the fourth quarter of

last year, or 12.2 percent of the total.

"While the number went up from 69 units in the third quarter, the percentage went down," noted Plachno. Conversion shells represented 16.1 percent of the market in the third quarter, 14.8 percent in the second quarter and 17.9 percent in the first quarter.

Questions about *National Bus Trader* quarterly and annual sales reports should be directed to Plachno at (815) 946-2341, or e-mail lplachno@busmag.com.

'07 engines

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

coach manufacturers on the panel would comment on the projected price increase.

Although the panel members held that maintenance will not be seriously impacted by the particulate filters, they did stress the devices will require cleaning. The diesel oxidation catalysts that the particular filters are replacing required no extra maintenance.

The panelists said the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency will recommend the filters be cleaned every 150,000 miles, but

the manufacturers expect the devices will not need attention until at least 300,000 miles and possibly even 400,000.

Mechanics will have two options when they work on the filters — clean them without removing them from the engine by using a special machine that will vacuum out the soot, or swap the filters with used ones that were removed from other coaches and cleaned on the bench. Both procedures will take about two hours.

The filters will require the attention of drivers, as well as maintenance personnel. The 2007 coaches will be equipped with a

dashboard light that will come on and alert the driver if the filters have become so clogged with soot that they require immediate attention and cleaning.

"So, the operators will have to become a little involved to know when to take their coach to the shop," noted Jason Nelson of Caterpillar.

Drivers and others with fueling responsibilities will have to be diligent about making sure the right fuel goes into the new coaches. That's because the 2007 engines are being designed to run only on ultra-low sulfur diesel fuel, which is supposed to become available every-

where later this year but could end up being difficult to find.

"You'll have to plan your trips a little better," suggested Carrie Ann Baker of Volvo Power Train.

East attempted to allay concerns that some operators expressed about driving a newly purchased coach home from the manufacturer's plant, emphasizing that a tank or two of regular diesel fuel along the way — even across country — would not harm the fuel system or engine. "I really don't think it would hurt it," he said.

While some diesel engine builders are planning to allow trucking companies to begin testing

the new engines, starting as early as next month, there has been no public mention of any coach operators getting the same opportunity.

Trucking executives have expressed concern about the effect of the new-engine technology on daily performance and the life of the engines.

Rich Shearing of Detroit Diesel said the move to cleaner engines actually was an opportunity to improve the design of the engines, and the company is moving in that direction. Among steps already taken is the moving of some engine components so they are easier for mechanics to reach and service.

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MOTORCOACH EXPO 2006

Greater bus safety is goal, says top FMCSA official; rule-making pipeline fills

TAMPA — The administrator of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration says her agency has stepped up enforcement of bus safety regulations and operators should expect to see more of the same for the foreseeable future.

"In the last year or so we have honed in on bus safety in five areas," Annette Sandberg said in a speech delivered at Motorcoach Expo 2006 here last month.

She said the FMCSA has significantly increased the number of compliance reviews of coach companies and conducted more safety inspections; begun a study of buses involved in crashes; challenged states to do more safety inspections; initiated efforts to improve the SafeStat data analysis system that's used to identify and prioritize operators for FMCSA and state safety improvement and enforcement programs, and pushed to accelerate the timetable for con-

ducting reviews of new-to-the-industry operators, called new-entrant audits.

The FMCSA conducted 20 percent more compliance reviews in fiscal 2005 than it initially planned for the year, and has set a goal of another 20 percent increase for this year.

High on Sandberg's priority list is to push for more states that do not conduct motorcoach safety inspections — that meet federal standards — to begin doing so soon. Currently, only 24 states conduct federally approved inspections either by highway patrol officers or transportation department inspectors. The others either don't do them, rely on federal regulators to conduct inspections, or conduct half-baked inspections.

"We need to challenge the states to do more inspections," she said, adding that federal regulators want to identify unsafe operators and either get them compliant or



FMCSA Administrator Annette Sandberg, right, talks with Rose-Marie Rodriguez of the South Jersey Transportation Authority at Motorcoach Expo.

put them out of business.

The United Motorcoach Association has long advocated that the FMCSA get tough with states on the issue of establishing bus inspection programs that meet minimal federal standards.

Operators from states that do not inspect coaches are now facing problems if they attempt to operator their buses in British Columbia, which will only honor inspections from the two-dozen states with adequate inspection programs.

Currently, the FMCSA is

CONTINUED ON PAGE 16 ►

Insurer issues warning about drivers, bus fires

TAMPA — A top executive with the motorcoach industry's largest insurer says operators are facing two serious problems that need to be addressed by regulators and bus manufacturers: drivers who fall asleep at the wheel and fires.

Mickey Bayard, vice president of marketing at Lancer Insurance, said bus fires continue to be of widespread concern to the industry, but a more significant problem — that results in many more series incidents — is drivers who fall asleep at the wheel, causing crashes.

Bayard says that in at least two-thirds of highway accidents involving motorcoaches there are no skid marks, indicating the drivers were sleeping at the time of the crash.

His comments came at the State Association Summit which, for the second year in a row, kicked off Motorcoach Expo 2006.

Such a damning statistic about driver-caused crashes could lead to federal regulators looking much more carefully at the condition of

drivers than they now do, observed Norm Littler, senior vice president of the United Motorcoach Association.

As for bus fires, Bayard said that if their causes continue to go unchecked by the industry, they could have a major impact on the insurance premiums paid by operators.

He suggested there is a need to determine which coach brands and models are involved in most of the fires.

"As we sort these things out, you could see premiums go up or we may not want to insure some of them at all," he said. "And we could see insurance rates based on the models that catch fire the most."

Bayard said after the meeting that while Lancer is not considering such a move, the idea is not far fetched. He said it could become reality for the coach industry insurance market one day.

"At some point in time we will

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14 ►

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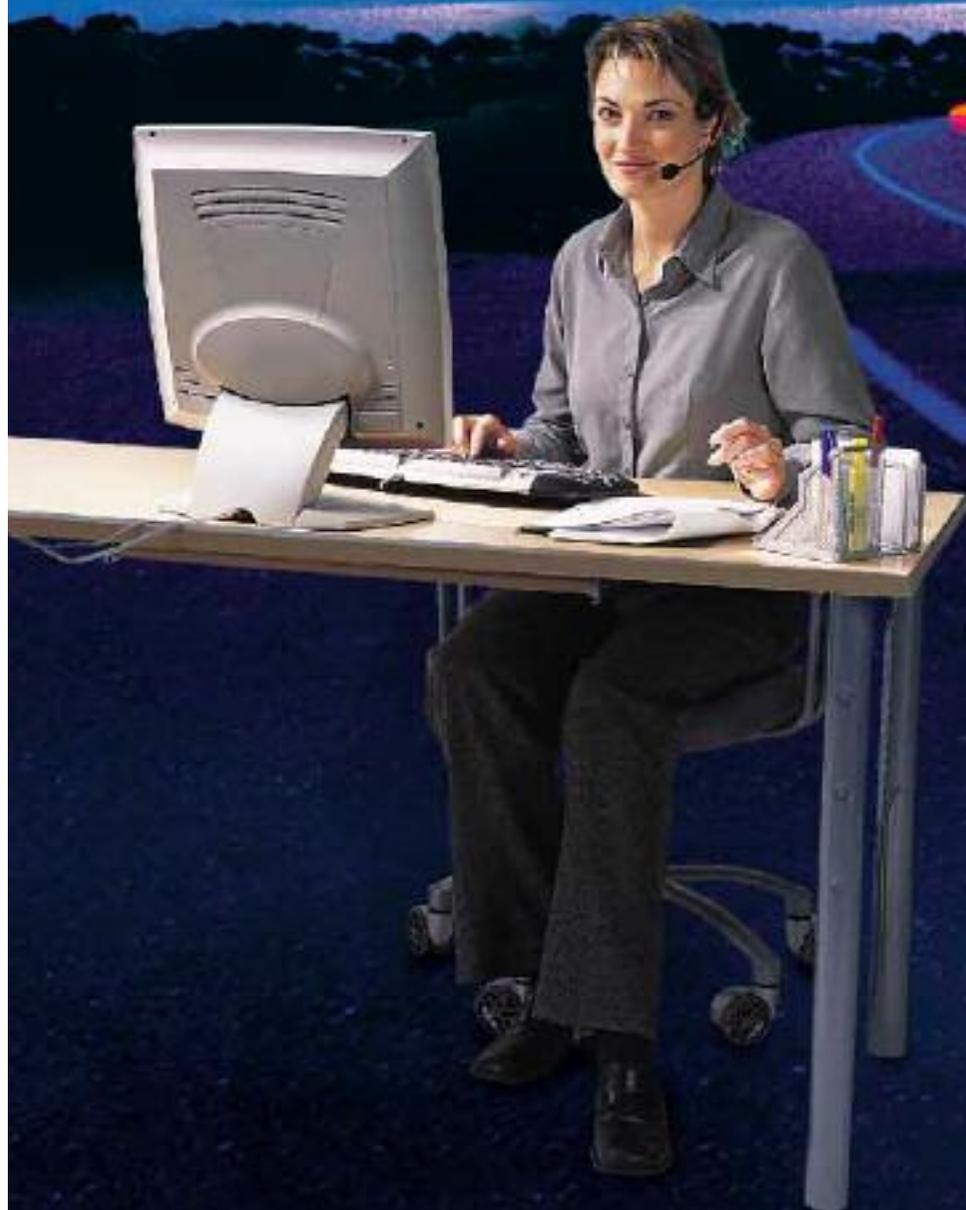
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Edythe and Irving Harris of Pro-Tran in Fort Washington, Md., (couple in center) are surrounded by friends during the Welcome Reception at the expansive Florida Aquarium. At far left is Frank Smith of A Yankee Line in Boston (in the fedora) and Daryl Johnson of J&J Charters in Crosby, Texas (in the dark baseball cap).



Bill Harnett of RBS (at right) discusses motorcoach industry software with Robert O'Brien of Time Lines in Oklahoma City.



Two industry veterans, Ralph Young of Young Transportation in Asheville, N.C. (at left) converses with Eric Annett of Sebring, Fla.-based Annett Bus Lines (in leather jacket).

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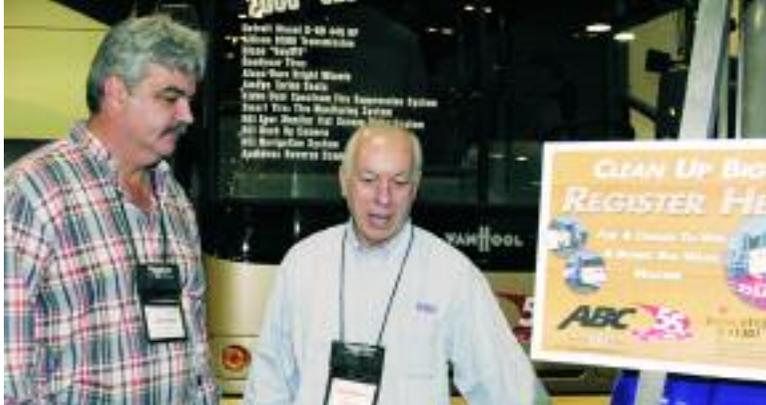
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Kevin Creighton of West Valley Charter Lines in Campbell, Calif., enjoys a lighter moment during one of the education sessions at Motorcoach Expo. This year's Solution Sessions posted record attendance.



Joan Libby of Cavalier Coach in Boston (far left) moderates a panel discussion on developing and implementing a comprehensive business plan for a small motorcoach company. On the panel were (from left) Bob Garrett of Sunshine Travel/Express in Lancaster, S.C.; Bill Gentry of Gentry Trailways in Knoxville, Tenn., and Marcia Milton of First Priority Trailways in District Heights, Md.



Bruno Albanesi of Bitimec International (at right in light shirt) explains the features of Bitimec bus washers to operator Jack Wigley of All Aboard America, which is based in Mesa, Ariz.



UMA Chairman and CEO Victor Parra (far right in pin-stripe suit) greets honorary UMA board member Harry Eyre of Eyre Bus Service in Glenelg, Md. (opposite Parra). Eyre was a founding member of UMA. Eyre's son, Ron, chairman of the ABA, looks on.



Heather Lienhart of Arrow Coach Lines in Little Rock, Ark., prepares to put on a Tampa Bay Gasparilla Pirate Festival necklace before entering the Florida Aquarium for the Welcome Reception.

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CEO of UMA gets movie permit No. 1

Hundreds of motorcoach operators from across the U.S. have signed up for 2006-2007 movie-permit licenses. Motorcoach Movies, which issues public-performance licenses to coach operators, is supplying the operators with decals that are affixed to buses, signifying the coach can show movies legally. Victor Para (center), president

and CEO of the United Motorcoach Association, was presented with the first movie license decal for 2006-07, by Terry Colyer (left) and Barbara Nelson, both of St. Louis-based Motorcoach Movies. Showing a movie on a coach without a license can subject an operator to civil penalties ranging from \$750 to \$30,000 per movie.

Bus fires

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10

have to start charging more for those coaches that catch fire the most," he emphasized. "That's how insurance works. If something is more risky than something else,

then it is priced accordingly."

He said that ultimately the manufacturers of buses that have the most fires are responsible for finding and correcting the problem. "The company with the name or the insignia on the door must be responsible," he added.

In the meantime, he suggested that fire-suppression equipment could help. Operators that install such equipment on their coaches would not get a break on their insurance premiums, though, according to Bayard. "We price on risk," he said.

UMA picks Brian Scott as chairman for 2006-07

TAMPA, Fla. — The board of directors of the United Motorcoach Association has elected new leaders for the next two years.

Brian L. Scott, vice president of Escot Bus Lines in Largo, Fla., succeeds David R. Brown as chairman of the association.

Brown, president of Holiday Tours in Randleman, N.C., had been UMA chairman for the past two years and Scott had been vice chairman.

UMA's other new officers for 2006-2007 are:

- Godfrey Lebron of Paradise Trailways in West Hempstead, N.Y., vice chairman.

- Todd Holland of Ramblin Express of Colorado Springs/Denver, secretary.

- Jeff Polzien of Red Carpet Tours in Oklahoma City, treasurer.

Scott, 37, began working in the family business in 1983, while still in high school. At the time, the company consisted of two buses, running shuttles to gaming facilities.

Since then, Escot Lines has grown to a fleet of 42 coaches,



Brian Scott

offering charter, contract and scheduled service.

Along the way, Scott served the Florida Motorcoach Association as vice president in 1997, and president in 1998 and again in 1999.

Elected to the board of UMA six years ago, he served on the legislative affairs and risk management committees.

Brown was honored twice at Motorcoach Expo for his service as chairman of UMA. He was recognized at Expo's opening session and at the Vision Awards Banquet near the end of the show.

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Transit competition remains No. 1 industry issue

TAMPA — Halting unfair competition from federally subsidized transit agencies continues to be the top legislative priority of motorcoach operators from across the United States.

Delegates to the second annual State Association Summit — held in conjunction with Motorcoach Expo 2006 — said too many transit agencies are ignoring federal charter service regulations that are supposed to restrict them from conducting charter work that could be done by private carriers.

“They’re eating our lunch right now,” bemoaned one operator attending the summit.

State coach association representatives called for stepped-up efforts against transit agencies that circumvent the federal rules that require them to let private carriers know when they have been requested to provide charter service and allow a private operator to do the work if it is able and available.

The legislative and regulatory affairs committee of the United Motorcoach Association board of directors joined in the call to keep transit competition the industry’s top priority, and the full UMA board of directors endorsed it as well. Both the committee and the board also met during Expo.

The industry plans to take its fight over transit agencies violating charter rules into a negotiated



Norman Littler of UMA



Gladys Gillis of Starline Transportation

rulemaking the Federal Transit Administration is expected to convene in Washington, D.C., in the next few weeks.

Norm Littler, the senior vice president of government and industry relations at UMA who moderated the state summit, said the industry plans to go to the rulemaking sessions armed with a large collection of transit violations from throughout the country.

Motorcoach operators are being urged to send to UMA and the American Bus Association detailed examples of transit agencies taking away their charter business.

New rules will be adopted by federal regulators that could toughen the charter service regulations

and possibly develop new tools to punish transit agency violators.

Motorcoach operators have long complained that they are unable to compete because transit agencies receive federal money to support their operations. In addition, they maintain that the transit agencies often solicit charter business away from private companies; they don’t always follow the notification regulations, and they are seldom punished by federal regulators when they are caught violating the rules.

Most of the operators who attended the state summit said transit competition is among their biggest problems and they urged UMA to continue to push for reforms.

Several said they also are having problems with churches that operated motorcoaches and state-owned buses.

The new federal highway reauthorization and public transit legislation that was adopted last year requires that all passenger buses — including those operated by churches — have insurance, a regulation that could force some of them out of the charter business. However, federal authorities have yet to determine how much insurance will be required.

The unfair competition problems are not limited to the United States.

Brian Crow, president and CEO of the Ontario Motorcoach Asso-

ciation and Motor Coach Canada, said public transit agencies are doing the same thing in Canada, although it may not be to the same extent as it is in the U.S. “We’re trying to hit them on safety issues,” he said, adding that transit buses have been seeing carrying standees while traveling down the highway at more than 60 miles an hour.

Gladys Gillis of the Northwest Motorcoach Association said the association had found a unique way to tackle the problem — educating public transit officials in Washington state on the current regulations. It hired a former attorney for the Federal Transit Administration to present a program detailing the rules to a meeting of officials from 29 transit agencies.

Representatives of the association said they were told by transit executives that they often do charter work because they want to push up their passenger numbers to obtain larger federal grants and because they are under pressure to do so by their boards of directors.

The numbers reason doesn’t wash, however, because under federal rules charter work cannot be counted toward passenger numbers that are used by the FTA when it passes out subsidies and grants.

In addition to transit competition, tax issues also drew the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 16 ►

Operators are honored at gala; kudos for the industry

TAMPA — For the third-consecutive year, the Vision Awards Banquet held during Motorcoach Expo turned out to be a stellar, sometimes emotional, evening, providing both a festive event and a few surprises.

UMA President & CEO Victor Parra set the tone for the evening by noting that while a handful of operators would be honored with awards during the banquet, the entire motorcoach industry should be taking a bow for the splendid work it did in evacuating thousands of victims of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita late last summer.

Parra said the scores of companies that sent 1,100 buses and 2,000 drivers to the Gulf Coast reflected great credit on the industry.

But while many in the motorcoach industry saw and lived the disaster first hand, Parra said it is time for the motorcoach industry to shine a positive light on the City of New Orleans and the surrounding area.

For that reason, he said, UMA is eager to hold Motorcoach Expo 2007 in New Orleans, and he said city officials have told him the city is “ready, willing and able to give



Autumn Dipert Brown



Jimmy Cantrell



Dan Smith



Tom Ready



Norman Arensdorf



Lisa Holland

us a good time.”

New Orleans is expected to be a strong draw for next year’s Expo — in no small measure because of the curiosity factor. By then, the hurricane devastation of August 2005, will be 16-17 months in the rear-view mirror and many people will want to see for themselves the aftermath, as well as the pace of recovery.

The city will have hosted a number of major conventions by January 2007, meaning any worries about New Orleans’ ability to handle Expo will have been put to rest.

Parra presented a plaque to Lisa Holland, tourism sales manager for the New Orleans Convention and Visitor Bureau, to cement the industry and Expo commit-

ment to the city and to honor the bureau for its perseverance.

An emotional Holland told banquet attendees that the city and the bureau were touched by the industry support, and she promised New Orleans would rebound from its crippling blow.

Parra also recognized outgoing UMA Chairman David Brown of Holiday Tours in Randleman, N.C. Parra said Brown had served the association and its members “more than well” during the past two years.

Under Brown’s leadership, membership had grown, as well as member benefits. Brown always kept a steadfast focus, Parra said, on the association mission.

Five major industry awards were presented at the banquet.

Here are the winners:

UMA Safety Leader of the Year: Autumn Dipert Brown of Dan Dipert Coaches in Arlington, Texas. Award presenter Carmen Daecher of Daecher Consulting Group said Brown not only had made a measurable impact on the safety of her own company but had played a key role in developing the curriculum for the innovative safe-driver program operated by the International Motorcoach Group.

BusRide Motorcoach Industry Achievement Award: Village Charters in Wichita, Kan. The company and its principals, Norman and Jeff Arensdorf, were said to exemplify leadership, accomplishment and achievement.

Metro Magazine Motorcoach

Operator of the Year: Tom Ready of Ready Bus Line of LaCrescent, Minn. Ready not only has served the industry well, but he’s also a “straightforward guy.”

The final awards for the evening were the UMA Vision Awards, which go to two operators that embody the UMA vision to lead the coach industry into the future and raise the standards for operators everywhere.

UMA Vision Award/Small Operator (less than 15 coaches): Jimmy Cantrell of Daniel’s Charters/Tours in Gainesville, Ga.

UMA Vision Award/Large Operator (15 or more coaches): Dan Smith and Sandra Allen of Royal Coach Tours in San Jose, Calif.

Issue No. 1

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 15

concern of the state delegates, some of whom complained about increases in a variety of taxes and new highway tolls that have been adopted by states.

Operators attending the meeting urged UMA to make a special effort to let federal lawmakers know they already are heavily taxed by states and cannot afford additional taxes at the federal level.

There also were new concerns about possible requirements that three-point seat belts or lap belts be installed in school buses, especially since California in July will require that all new school buses contain three-point belts similar to the type used in automobiles.

Currently, California, New York, Florida and New Jersey are the only states that require lap belts in school buses, while only New Jersey requires seat-belt usage.

Several operators said there is a strong perception around the country that seat belts on school buses save lives, although there appears to be little research to support the belief. They suggested that a program to educate the public might be in order to avoid a possible move to require the installation of belts in existing buses.

"It is an issue that is not going to go away," warned Littler of UMA.

A requirement effective in 2008 that U.S. residents prove their citizenship with a passport or specially issued federal identification card at Canadian and Mexican border crossing in order to return to the U.S. could impact motorcoach travel between the countries, some operators warned.

Although the requirement is two years away, it already has been blamed for a 16 percent decline in U.S. traffic into Canada. Congress passed the law in an effort to improve border security after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

Crow cautioned that the identification program might not even work as it is intended.

"That may not be what you want because it is only an identification card, not a security card," he said.

Here's a look at other issues facing states:

New Jersey — The state's new emission reduction device retrofit program is being financed by a corporate franchise tax, which means there is little chance the tax will be

eliminated as sought by the motorcoach industry, and there is a good chance it could be increased if the retrofit program runs low on funds. Additionally, the state recently increased taxes on new tires and is considering raising fuel taxes.

California — There is talk among state legislators about raising the fuel tax.

New York — A regulation that requires bus drivers in the state to be fingerprinted and to pass both written and road tests could be extended to out-of-state drivers who come into New York. Tolls have been increased along the New York Thruway.

South Carolina — Lawmakers are looking at removing the cap on the flat \$300 sales tax on new vehicles and possibly replacing it with a 5 percent tax.

Virginia — Proposals for new fuel, consumer and user taxes are being tossed around by legislators and others.

Illinois — Road tolls have been increased.

Georgia — A law that classifies a bus as a truck is resulting in coach drivers getting tickets for driving in HOV lanes. Trucks are not allowed in the high occupancy lanes. Coach operators are negotiating the issue with the state and chances of resolving it appear good.

Minnesota — A temporary hold has been placed on a requirement that only 2 percent biodiesel fuel be sold in the state.

Oklahoma — Voters in the state turned down a proposal to increase fuel taxes. However, a battle continues over a sharp reduction in excise taxes that lawmakers gave the trucking industry, but did not extend to motorcoaches.

Pennsylvania — A lawsuit led to buses being removed from new regulations that state officials adopted for them and cabs and limousines.

Texas — Lawmakers approved legislation that all new highways built in the state must be toll roads.

North Carolina — New fuel taxes and road tolls are under consideration.

Maryland — The fee for passenger pickups at BWI was doubled to \$150. Also a new contract fee was established for companies doing business with the state. The fee must be paid before vendors can receive any payments from the state.



UMA Chairman David Brown helped present the Zanetti Award to FMCSA Administrator Annette Sandberg.

Good government award is presented to Sandberg

TAMPA — The United Motorcoach Association has honored the administrator of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, Annette Sandberg, by presenting her with the Pete Zanetti Good Government Memorial Award.

The association said Sandberg was deserving of the award because she has "demonstrated again and again, through keen insight and a common-sense approach to regulation and enforcement that she knows what needs to be done" to improve motor carrier safety.

In presenting the award, UMA Senior Vice President for Government and Industry Relations Norman Littler said that the changes Sandberg has implemented at the FMCSA "are nothing short of astounding."

"Gone is the time when officials too often gave a hundred reasons why important safety improvements couldn't be made. Gone are the days when passenger carriers lived deeply in the shadow of the trucking industry."

"Administrator Sandberg's leadership deserves the credit for these changes," Littler told several hundred operators attending the Legislative and Regulatory Update Session at Motorcoach Expo 2006.

"The award we present today is the motorcoach industry's way of saying 'thank you,' not only for her exceptional leadership, but also to honor the members of her agency as a whole, from the leadership team, to the folks in the field," said Littler.

"We are grateful for the attention which is now being paid by

the agency to getting unsafe and uninsured passenger carriers off the highways. The FMCSA is doing this by stepping up compliance reviews, conducting early audits of new entrants in the industry, and completing more thorough and timely reviews of carriers' data, which may indicate they have safety problems.

"We also are grateful for the rulemaking the agency is now pursuing that will go along way in making certain the medical providers who conduct physical qualification examinations are in fact following Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations.

"After all, 95 percent of commercial vehicle crashes are directly relate to human-factor failure, while the remainder is vehicle related. It makes no sense to apply some \$200 million dollars a year to fix 5 percent of the problem."

The board of UMA established the Pete Zanetti Good Government Memorial Award four years ago to honor the memory of one of the association's founding members who died six years ago.

It recognizes public officials who have made exceptional contributions to the well-being of the bus and motorcoach industry; it is not given annually.

"In the view of the UMA board, Administrator Sandberg has distinguished herself and brought great credit to her agency, making her most deserving of this honor," said Littler.

Presenting Sandberg the award were outgoing UMA Chairman David Brown, and Victor Parra, president and CEO of the association.

The FAA has long been the federal agency responsible for the government's transportation needs and has had a standing contract with Landstar for years.

Landstar disclosed in October that its third-quarter revenues reached a record \$676 million, and \$129.6 million of it came from its disaster relief contract with the federal government.

Sandberg

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10

attempting to conduct safety audits of new-entrant operators during the first nine months the companies are in business. Earlier, the agency had set a goal of getting the audits done within the first six months after a company begins operations but apparently hasn't been able to get them done that quickly.

Sandberg also warned operators to expect a slew of rulemakings from her agency during the next four years.

The FMCSA had 28 rulemakings pending **before** Congress passed the five-year highway reauthorization law late last summer. That act added requirements for 18 more rulemakings.

Here are a few of the changes and rulemakings operators will see in the next few months and years:

- A national registry of medical examiners will be established for the motor carrier industry. Only those doctors on the list will be able to medically certify drivers. "They will know our needs," said Sandberg.

- A special medical review board will be set up to review all medical regulations with an eye toward updating them.

- A rulemaking will tie the CDL to driver medical cards and give them a common expiration date.

- A unified registration system for carriers will be created.

- A regulation covering electronic onboard recorders will be issued.

Although she didn't mention it, new guidelines for driver training also are expected to be issued by Sandberg's agency. A federal appeals court, using tough language, threw out the current FMCSA driver training guidelines last year.

The United Motorcoach Association was party to the successful suit against the FMCSA that resulted in the court ordering the FMCSA to come up with new driver training rules.

Sandberg won applause when she noted that the new federal highway and public transit law requires all private carriers — schools and churches among them — to have insurance on their buses. However, the FMCSA has yet to determine the exact amount of insurance that will be required for church buses.

Enforcement of safety regulations is critical, said Sandberg, and it is a major priority of her agency. "We need to push our enforcement programs very aggressively. We need to show the public we are working for safety," she stressed.

To the surprise of some, Sandberg skipped an opportunity to talk about several key issues facing the motorcoach industry.

She didn't say a word about bus fires, Mexican buses coming across the border and possibly operating without insurance and going beyond commercial zones, and a number of driver-related safety concerns.

Evacuation

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

lawyers, to try to get the money owed them by the subcontractors. One Georgia operator says he was paid only after he threatened to sic CNN on the contractor that was refusing to pay. The operator insists he was serious about the threat and had talked to a CNN reporter who

was poised to investigate.

Other operators say they have written to their congressional representatives.

Those who have attempted to report the situation to federal agencies and bureaucrats — who are supposed to be investigating such incidents — say that route has largely been a waste of time and effort.

Meantime, the Gulf Coast Re-

construction Watch reports that an audit being conducted by the inspector general's office is focusing on Landstar's billing practices and the FAA's auditing record for the evacuation work. The report, which is expected to be completed soon, will make recommendations to the FAA so that before the next hurricane season the agency has a baseline for transportation services.

Prevost launches X3-45; upscale coaches abound

TAMPA — Anyone who thinks the customer base of the motorcoach industry is composed exclusively of penny-pinching old folks, riding run-down coaches to gambling palaces, obviously has been living in a grease pit.

Most of the major coach manufacturers exhibiting at Motorcoach Expo 2006 here last month had super-luxury passenger coaches on display, including a stunning Setra S417 that was sold on the show floor.

But the luxury coaches weren't the only thing generating excitement.

Prevost Car unveiled a new model, the X3-45, whose design is based on Prevost's XLII entertainer shell. The X3 is a seated coach that eliminates shortcomings that for years limited XLII sales to tour-and-charter operators.

The X3 has the longest wheelbase in the tour-coach market (at nearly 28 feet) but a relatively tight turning radius (42.5 feet), thanks to an increased turning angle for the front wheels; automatic tag-axle unloading, and an independent front suspension. A beam axle is offered as an option.

The longer wheelbase means more weight is shifted to the front axle.

The overall effect of the changes, says Prevost, is the industry's best riding coach.

The under-floor luggage compartment of the X3 has a maximum capacity of 406 cubic feet. That compares to a modest 340 cubic feet for a conventional XLII model.

The X3 also has an upgraded A/C system with nine-ton compressor, advanced multiplexing, and a new premium sound system with AM/FM/CD. A GPS system and a backup camera also are available.

The X3 comes standard with a ZF AS-tronic transmission; the Allison B500 is optional.

ABC Companies and Van Hool announced a series of passenger and safety enhancements for the T2100 and C2000 Van Hool coaches. The 2006 upgrades include:

- REI Elite Entertainment System. Van Hool coaches are the first to get this next-generation entertainment system from REI.
- SmartTire tire-pressure monitoring system.
- Audiovox accident avoidance system, featuring four sensors



mounted in the rear bumper.

- Kidde Dual Spectrum engine compartment fire suppression system.

- A full back window in the T2100 coach.

The luxury Setra S417 featured specially designed, leather-upholstered Setra seats in a 2-by-1 configuration. The coach also had a factory installed galley that was developed especially for the U.S. market and features appliances commonly found in American stores. The entertainment system has 15-inch flat-screen monitors and a driver camera that allows the driver to transmit his picture over the entertainment system while he is speaking to the passengers.

An MCI E4500 LX Touring Coach at the MCI stand gave up nothing to the Setra in terms of



The luxury Setra S417 has sumptuous leather seating

amenities and luxury.

It had 42-Amaya Brazil passenger seats upholstered in rich burgundy leather (also in a 2-by-1

configuration); DirecTV satellite receiver; halogen interior lighting; Ostrich-grained coverings, and deluxe galley.

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Maintenance courses offered by MCI

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — Motor Coach Industries has unveiled the 2006 schedule for its Technical Training Institute which offers 17 courses at a variety of locations throughout the year. Three of the courses are offered in Spanish.

MCI says the courses are designed to improve the skill level of coach operator technicians and those completing each training module will be certified by MCI as proficient in that system and model.

MCI also offers a Master Mechanic certification for those who complete an examination covering all modules for a particular coach model.

A fee is charged to attend the courses — \$375 for basic courses in electrical, HVAC, air produc-

tion and preventive maintenance, and steering/suspension systems. Advanced courses — electrical, engine, transmission, HVAC and vehicle dynamics — cost \$250. An HVAC course with 608 certification costs \$750.

Here are the courses being offered through the end of June:

Basic air production: 3/14-15, Winnipeg; 5/2-3, Nashville

Basic air system (Spanish): 3/9, Dallas

Basic electrical: 4/18-19, Montreal

Basic electrical (Spanish): 3/7, Dallas; 3/21, Los Alamitos, Calif.

Advanced electrical (I/O Controls): 2/22, Blackwood, N.J.; 3/8, Nashville; 3/29, Winnipeg; 4/26, Dallas; 5/24, Los Alamitos; 6/28, Loudonville, Ohio.

Advance electrical (MCI): 2/21, Blackwood, N.J.; 3/7, Nashville; 3/28, Winnipeg; 4/25, Dallas; 5/23, Los Alamitos; 6/27, Lou-

donville.

Basic HVAC: 2/9-10, Nashville; 4/20-21, Montreal; 6/22-23, North Vancouver, B.C.

Basic HVAC (Spanish): 3/8, Dallas; 3/22, Los Alamitos.

Advanced HVAC: 2/21-23, Minneapolis; 2/23, Blackwood; 3/30, Winnipeg; 4/27, Dallas; 5/25, Los Alamitos; 6/29, Loudonville

HVAC/608 Certification: 2/14-17, Des Plaines, Ill.; 2/28-3/3, Blackwood; 3/28-31, Nashville; 5/15-19, Dallas; 6/6-9, Los Alamitos

Powertrain/DDC Series 16: 2/14, Nashville; 3/21, Blackwood; 4/18, Los Alamitos; 5/16, Loudonville; 6/20, Orlando

Powertrain/Cat C13: 2/25, Nashville; 3/22, Blackwood; 4/19, Los Alamitos; 5/17, Loudonville; 6/21, Orlando

Powertrain/Allison & ZF: 2/26, Nashville; 3/23, Blackwood; 4/20, Los Alamitos; 5/18, Loudonville; 6/22, Orlando

Basic steering/Suspension: 3/16-17, Winnipeg; 5/4-5, Nashville

Vehicle dynamics/D models: 2/21, Loudonville; 3/14, Des Plaines; 4/25, Nashville; 5/9, Dallas; 6/13, Winnipeg

Vehicle dynamics/E models: 3/15, Des Plaines; 4/26, Nashville; 5/10, Dallas; 6/14, Winnipeg

Vehicle dynamics/J models: 3/16, Des Plaines; 4/27, Nashville; 5/11, Dallas; 6/15, Winnipeg

For more information, call (701) 825-5227 or (502) 318-3000, ext. 3577, or e-mail mcitraining@mcicoach.com. Information also is posted under Parts/Service/Support on MCI's Web site, www.mcicoach.com.

Vehicle dynamics/J models: 3/16, Des Plaines; 4/27, Nashville; 5/11, Dallas; 6/15, Winnipeg

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MCI negotiating to launch Atlantic City service center

ATLANTIC CITY, N.J. — Motor Coach Industries is wrapping up negotiations to operate one of its fleet support service centers at the Atlantic City Transportation Center.

Assuming all of the details can be worked out — as the parties expect, the arrangement is expected to be complete by late spring.

The transportation center, which has operated for 20 years and is owned by Ole Hansen and Sons Inc., serves as the parking hub, fueling station and bus-wash facility for the 110,000-plus coaches that visit Atlantic City annually.

Until last month, the three-bay, 8,000-square-foot maintenance facility was operated by Greyhound Lines for its coaches. Greyhound has relocated.

As an MCI Fleet Support service center, the facility will be open seven days a week for service, warranty work, repairs and parts sales.

"We welcome the opportunity to serve all operators visiting Atlantic City," said Tom Sorrells, MCI president and chief executive. "Our Blackwood, New Jersey,

facility has been operating at peak capacity for a year, so the timing is right for us to expand."

Sorrells said business at MCI service centers is up 25 percent nationwide, and "we believe it's because customers are recognizing our commitment to them. Our presence in Atlantic City should affirm that."

As MCI's ninth service center, the Atlantic City facility will offer the same services as other MCI Fleet Support centers. For example, it will:

- Guarantee same-day coach repairs if the repair is estimated to take less than four hours. No appointment will be necessary.

- Give a 90-day warranty on all parts and labor.

"The Atlantic City Transportation Center is ideally located on the bay, right where coaches park and where drivers can relax," said Jerry Cignarella, vice president of MCI Fleet Support service centers. Dan Heath, general manager of MCI's service center in Blackwood, also will be responsible for the new center.

The facility is at 1501 Albany Boulevard, Exit 2.

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CUSA

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

more/ Washington, D.C.

American Coach Lines has a fleet of 430 motorcoaches and 110 other vehicles, mostly small and midsize buses. It has 1,200 full- and part-time employees.

Dallas-based CUSA, which primarily operates under the Coach USA name in 20 markets of the Southwest, Rocky Mountains and West Coast, has 1,100 motorcoaches and 900 other vehicles.

The deal will leave CUSA the

second-largest private bus operator in North America, ahead of Greyhound Lines but slightly behind Coach USA, according to figures in the January issue of *Metro Magazine*.

CUSA has filed for approval of the purchase of American Coach Lines with the Surface Transportation Board, a unit of the U.S. Department of Transportation.

When completed, the acquisition will expand CUSA's reach across the southern half of the U.S. On the East Coast, the network will extend north from Miami to the

Baltimore-Washington area, and on the West Coast it will stretch from San Diego to Portland, Ore.

CUSA CEO Craig Lentzsch said his company and American Coach Lines share a common approach to customers, "which should insure a smooth consolidation."

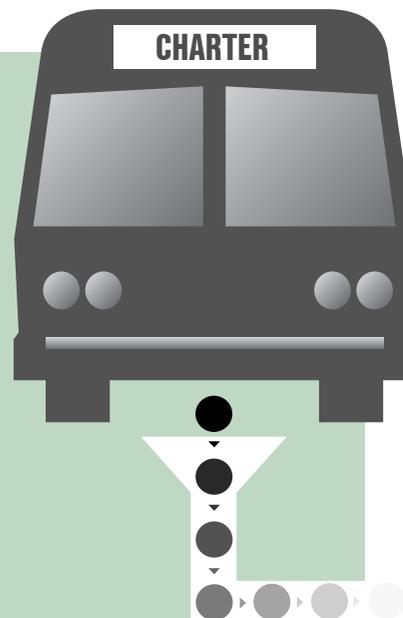
Added American Coach Lines' CEO Mark Kontinen: "We're excited about the opportunity to become part of CUSA because both companies are dedicated to safety and high-quality customer service."

In the week before the announcement, speculation about CUSA buying American Coach Lines was a favorite topic of conversation at Motorcoach Expo in Tampa. There was considerable discussion about whether the deal made operational sense or if there were efficiencies to be gained from the deal.

In the end, the prevailing thought was that the purchase probably boiled down to two factors: CUSA was offered a deal that was too good to pass up, or American Coach Lines is performing very well, or both.

CUSA declined to expand on the reasons behind the deal, saying it was premature.

American Coach Lines is being sold by the group of investors, led by Lincolnshire Management, a private equity fund manager based in New York, that formed the company in late 2003 and early 2004.



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Respected operator Jim Drucker dies

BELMONT, Calif. — James A. Drucker, a much-respected motorcoach operator from Northern California, died late last month after losing his battle with cancer. He was 64.

Mr. Drucker owned and operated San Francisco-based Franciscan Lines for 33 years, selling the company in late 1997 to Travelways, the coach industry consolidator that operated for a few years in the late 1990s.

Mr. Drucker served as a regional vice president of Travelways, which changed its name to VecTour, before retiring in 2000, to enjoy life with his wife, Shirley, their daughters and grandchildren.

During his career, he served as president of the California Bus Association.

Mr. Drucker's closest industry colleagues remember him as a highly principled and astute operator, an effective and farsighted business executive, a devoted family man, and an exceptional person. "You couldn't beat him... he was a man for all seasons," said one.

"Over the course of his long career in the bus industry, Jim set the standard for a well-run and

highly respected charter company," said Michael R. Waters, vice president and general manager of CUSA Franciscan Lines/Gray Line/San Francisco Sightseeing.

"Numerous individuals benefited from the friendship and mentoring Jim provided, many of whom continue on to this day as leaders in the motorcoach industry. He will be missed by all."

Jim Casey, head of CUSA's charter department in San Francisco, was a friend of Mr. Drucker's for more than 40 years, worked for him for 20 years, and came into the industry at Mr. Drucker's beckoning in 1978.

"His demeanor as a man, you couldn't beat him," said Casey. "He was moral and honest. In his view, people worked with him, not for him. He knew everyone who worked for him even when he had more than 100 employees. He was there every day, and (on those rare occasions when he wasn't at the company) he was always reachable.

"He had a marvelous knack for reading the business," Casey continued. "He knew exactly when to increase the number of buses (in his fleet) and when to sell off buses."

Casey remembered that Mr. Drucker asked his employees to always be mindful of telephone manners because "the next phone call may become a 20-year customer." He liked to emphasize the point with a story about getting a call at home late one night from an individual who desperately needed coaches on short notice. Mr. Drucker was able to supply them, and the caller became one of his company's best customers.

Yet, said Casey, Mr. Drucker "didn't toot his own horn.... He was a wonderful man."

Mr. Drucker's favorite avocation was golf. He was a member of San Francisco's famed Olympic Club for nearly 30 years, serving on its board from 1995-98, and as club president his final year.

In 1998, the Olympic Club hosted the U.S. Open, which was won by Lee Janzen, who came from five strokes back to defeat Payne Stewart on the Lake Course. Mr. Drucker, as the club president, had an opportunity to rub elbows with the sport's greatest players.

He also was a member of Spyglass Hill Golf Course, the toughest test of golf in Northern



James A. Drucker

California and among the most difficult courses in the world.

Many of Mr. Drucker's closest friendships were formed on the golf course. In recent years, he and his wife traveled widely in Europe — particularly enjoying the golf courses in England and Ireland.

Mr. Drucker was a native of San Francisco, and educated at St. Ignatius High School and the University of San Francisco.

In addition to his widow, Mr. Drucker is survived by three daughters, a sister, and eight grandchildren.

Donations in Mr. Drucker's name are being accepted for the Drucker Family Scholarship Fund, in care of St. Ignatius College Preparatory, 2001 37th Ave., San Francisco, CA 94116.

Calendar

FEBRUARY 2006

3-8 American Bus Association Marketplace 2006, Gaylord Opryland Nashville Resort & Convention Center, Nashville. Info: (800) 283-2877, or go to www.buses.org.

20-21 ABA-UMA Security and Emergency Preparedness Planning Workshop, Hartford, Conn. Co-sponsor: New England Bus Association. Info: Contact Daecher Consulting Group, (717) 975-9190, or e-mail security@safetyteam.com.

23-26 North Carolina Motorcoach Association Annual Meeting & Market Place, Hilton University Place, Charlotte, N.C. Info: (336) 495-4970 or go to www.ncmotorcoach.org.

MARCH 2006

6-7 ABA-UMA Security and Emergency Preparedness Planning Workshop, 70th annual Trailways Conference and Meeting, Scottsdale, Ariz. Co-sponsor: Trailways Transportation System. Info: Contact Daecher Consulting Group, (717) 975-9190, or e-mail security@safetyteam.com.



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A stack of champagne glasses on a tray in a coach interior. The stack consists of three glasses in the front row, two in the middle row, and one in the back row. The glasses are filled with champagne and are set on a dark tray. The background shows the interior of a coach with blue seats and orange trim.

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