

Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE BUS INDUSTRY

Operators are urged to register for charter notices

WASHINGTON D.C. — Private motorcoach operators take notice.

If you're interested in continuing to compete for charter work that has been offered to public transit agencies, you'll have to register with the Federal Transit Agency.

The requirement is part of the new charter service rules that were adopted in January and which are

to become effective April 30. (See Feb. 1 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

Under the new rules, the "willing-and-able" public notice provision that currently allows motorcoach operators to compete for charter work that public transit agencies may be interested in providing is out and the registration procedure is in.

The registration will result in

motorcoach operators getting electronic notifications whenever a transit agency in their area becomes aware of a charter opportunity that legally should be done only by a private carrier.

These include charters that are subsidized by a third party, and those that if a transit agency did them would require a "premium" or fare that is different than the

normal bus fare.

Although the new procedure does not take effect until May 1, the United Motorcoach Association is strongly urging coach operators to sign up now so they are on the list well before the change begins.

After April 30, there will be no notices mailed or published in local newspapers. All notices and charter opportunities will be posted by

transit agencies on the Website and e-mailed to operators that have registered.

To sign up, go to www.fta.dot.gov/charterregistration, click on "I accept these terms" and then "submit new charter operator registration."

The registration form is a simple one-page application that

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Detroit Diesel reportedly has told coach builders it will continue to support its engines.

Say 'good-bye' to Detroit Diesel

REDFORD, Mich. — Detroit Diesel has decided to say good-bye to most of the motorcoach industry.

The No. 1 supplier of engines to the over-the-road bus industry — since, well, almost forever — has decided it will no longer sell its engines to any bus builder it doesn't own.

Right now that means that starting in 2010 the only new motorcoaches sold in North America that will have Detroit Diesel engines will be Setras. That's because Setra is part of Daimler Buses North America, a unit of Daimler AG, which also owns Detroit Diesel.

Prevost Car, Motor Coach Industries and Van Hool no longer will be able to provide Detroit Diesel engines in their over-the-road buses.

While Detroit Diesel's decision, which wasn't announced by Detroit Diesel but by Prevost Car, seems startling on its face, it's not a total shocker.

Since Detroit Diesel was purchased by DaimlerChrysler eight years ago, it has been considered possible Daimler might one day turn off the engine spigot. After all, the thinking went, engines produced by a subsidiary of Daimler

were powering coaches that competed directly with buses made by other Daimler companies.

But other, perhaps more important, factors were at play as well.

2010 is another watershed year for diesel engines. While there has been a lot of attention paid to 2007 engines and their stricter emissions requirements, the 2010 diesel engine emissions rules are exponentially tougher.

The regulations are so stringent that Detroit Diesel spent \$1.5 billion to develop a brand new engine to meet the 2010 requirements

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Coach groups seek fixes, clarifications to new charter rules

WASHINGTON — Leading motorcoach industry trade associations and two of the industry's largest companies have asked the Federal Transit Administration to make changes to the revised charter bus rules before they go into effect April 30. (See Feb. 1 issue of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

Seven motorcoach organizations, plus the two companies, all of which took part in drafting the rules during months of negotiations with public transit operators, filed a formal request asking the FTA to reconsider its final product.

Separately, two members of the group filed individual petitions seeking additional modifications to the rule.

"In general, the petitioners believe the final charter rule is a significant improvement over the current rule," the larger group wrote in its filing with the FTA before complaining that some provisions of the new rules lack clarity and others were revised in a manner that will harm charter bus operators and make compliance with the rule impracticable, unreasonable and not in the public interest.

The petition was signed by the United Motorcoach Association, American Bus Association, California Bus Association, Coach America, Coach USA, Trailways Transportation System, National School Transportation Association, Northwest Motorcoach Association, and Taxicab, Limousine and Paratransit Association.

Their targets include wording that indicates the FTA is willing to exempt from the rule college campus shuttle services performed by transit agencies.

The nine petitioners contend that section of the new rule may lead to some transit agencies believing they can run campus shuttles that actually are charters and which should be handled by private carriers.

The group suggested the FTA either drop the wording or add additional details explaining when college shuttle service would be considered charter service.

Also under attack by the group is a provision that expands from three days to 40 days a special exemption transit agencies can

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Coach America pursues Lakefront

DALLAS — Coach America is negotiating to purchase Lakefront Lines/Lakefront Trailways, the largest motorcoach operator in Ohio and 20th largest in North America, plus its sister company, Hopkins Airport Limousine Service.

Although Coach America has filed an application with the Surface Transportation Board of the USDOT, seeking approval of the acquisition, the president of Lakefront Lines/Lakefront Trailways says a deal has not been completed or a definitive agreement signed.

"We're still negotiating," said Thomas Goebel. "It's premature to say anything. Call me in a week or two."

The proposed purchase of Lakefront is the second Coach America deal to be revealed in the past month. In early February the company announced it had signed a letter of intent to purchase Renzenberger Inc. of Kansas City, one of the nation's largest providers of transportation for railway employees. (See March 1 issue of *Bus & Motorcoach News* and related article below.)

In purchasing Lakefront, however, Coach America would get one of the industry's best-known, family-owned diversified motorcoach operations. Lakefront specializes in prearranged tours, charters and line-run service.

It has a limited line-run opera-

tion that serves cities in New York, West Virginia, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Indiana and Illinois. The company considers it a niche business that helps keep its coaches on the road and producing revenue.

It also offers casino runs, shuttle services and a wide range of tours.

All of the stock in Lakefront is owned by Thomas Goebel, Jack Goebel and Mike Goebel, with a small number of preferred non-voting shares owned by other family members. Hopkins Limousine Service also is owned by the Goebel family.

Lakefront and Hopkins had combined revenues of roughly \$34 million last year.

In January, Lakefront Lines/Lakefront Trailways was awarded the United Motorcoach Association Vision Award at UMA Motorcoach Expo in San Francisco. The award recognizes business prowess and community involvement.

One of Lakefront's business hallmarks is a profit-sharing program for its employees. Since 1988, each full-time employee has received an annual bonus, ranging from \$7,000, to more than \$11,000. Each employee gets the same amount regardless of their position.

The limousine service got the Goebel family into the transportation business in early 1960s. The family purchased Lakefront Lines in 1980, when it had six buses.

Today, the company operates nearly 120 coaches, plus assorted other vehicles from its base in Brookpark, Ohio.

Should the deal be completed it would mark a significant geographic shift for Coach America, which is the nation's largest tour and charter motorcoach operator and controls 29 bus and passenger transportation operations.

Virtually all of Coach America's motorcoach operations are concentrated along the East and West Coasts and across the southern U.S., from Florida to California.

Chinatown buses clean up act

WASHINGTON — Urban legends, those apocryphal stories that frequently are framed as cautionary tales about horrific or exasperating events, generally live long and die hard.

Perhaps the bus industry's most prominent urban legend of the 21st century is that Chinatown bus operators are synonymous with dangerous transportation.

Now it appears that perception may be withering.

And it is the federal government that is taking the lead in debunking the notion that Chinatown bus companies, operating primarily in the northeastern U.S.,

are death machines on wheels.

Despite the occasional reports that Chinatown buses break down, blow up and catch fire, stranding passengers, federal officials are now insisting they are, in fact, safe.

The safety performance of Chinatown buses "is no worse or no better than the traditional terminal-to-terminal motorcoach carriers," says Duane DeBruyne, a spokesman for the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration.

The Chinatown operators, it would seem, have learned some lessons from being in the public spotlight and having regulators lean on them for the past three-plus years.

Van company drivers file 'overtime exemption' suit

KANSAS CITY, Kan. — Two drivers for Renzenberger Inc., the large provider of employee transportation for the railroad industry, have filed suit against the company claiming they were misclassified under the motor carrier exemption to the federal Fair Labor Standards Act.

Because they contend they were not exempt employees, the drivers say they are entitled to overtime pay under federal labor law. They are seeking the overtime pay on behalf of themselves and other Renzenberger road drivers.

The suit was filed last month in the United States District Court here just two days before it was announced that Coach America had signed a letter of intent to acquire 100 percent of the capital stock of Renzenberger. (See March 1 issue of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

An attorney for the drivers, Charles Frohman, said Renzen-

berger, which operates more than 1,500 vans in 23 states, "uniformly classified its road drivers as exempt from the (Fair Labor Standards Act) overtime requirements, even though it appears that many of its drivers should have been paid for their overtime hours worked."

In a phone conversation, Frohman declined to specify in what way the employees were misclassified.

Frohman is with a Minneapolis-based employment law firm, Nichols Kaster & Anderson PLLP, that is pursuing the case on a contingency basis. Two other Nichols Kaster attorneys, Paul Lukas, and Donald Nichols, are working with Frohman.

The motorcoach, school bus and trucking industries' exemption from federal overtime pay requirements pops up periodically as an item of interest. Legal challenges to

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Attorney says safety enforcement lagging

ATLANTA — A prominent transportation lawyer has strongly criticized federal safety and environmental regulators, saying they are failing both in enforcing their own regulations and developing workable regulations.

"It's sad to report but it's very, very true that federal agencies are unable to deal with the important transportation issues that are before them," said John Bagileo, a Washington, D.C., lawyer who has specialized in transportation issues for more than 40 years.

"Something is very broken on the federal side, and it's causing many of the problems we see, and forcing the states to do things," he

said. "What the federal government is not doing, the states are trying to do," he added.

One bit of evidence he cited was the problems the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration has had in implementing revised hours-of-service regulations for truckers. FMCSA has lost twice in federal courts on the HOS rule — and could be headed for a third loss, says Bagileo.

"I have never seen an agency reversed twice."

He said the HOS rule ultimately could be fashioned by Congress. "And that's not something you want to happen."

"It's not that the FMCSA does

not have knowledgeable people," Bagileo said. "The problem is they don't have expertise in the industry."

Likewise, FMCSA issued its first driver-training rule in 2004 but the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit overturned the rule and sent it back to the agency for further consideration.

On Dec. 27, the agency issued a notice of proposed rulemaking on the issue and has asked for public comment.

Bagileo also was critical of FMCSA for failing to administer serious punishment to commercial vehicle operators who are safety violators.

"An unsafe carrier gets caught, simply closes its doors, files a two-page, \$300 application, and within 30 days is up and running as another carrier," Bagileo said. "They (the FMCSA) may find out who violates the law but they do nothing about it."

In the 1960s, the Interstate Commerce Commission, the predecessor to the FMCSA, did a good job regulating railroads, motor carriers, water carriers and pipelines with only 1,800 employees, Bagileo said.

The U.S. Department of Transportation employs about 10,000 people and "simply cannot do the job they're assigned," he said.

Judge rules hot-fuel suit can proceed

KANSAS CITY, Kan. — A U.S. District Court judge has ruled that a lawsuit, alleging that fuel buyers are being cheated because fuel prices are not adjusted for the impact of temperature on fuel volume, can proceed.

The judge, Kathryn H. Vratil, ruled against oil companies and fuel retailers in the so-called "hot fuel" case. (See Aug. 1 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

The case is a consolidation of dozen of lawsuits filed against the oil companies and fuel retailers by consumers, truckers and others.

The basis of the suits is that because fuel expands as the temperature rises, the oil and fuel companies are profiting on "extra" gallons crated by the expansion.

The plaintiffs want fuel retailers to install pumps that adjust the fuel measure to reflect the actual fuel temperature as it comes out of underground storage tanks.

A U.S. House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform subcommittee study of 2006 data showed that hot fuel nationwide costs consumers an extra \$2.3 billion per year.

The oil companies and gas retailers argue that state regulations and industry standards define a gallon of gasoline by volume, not in terms of its energy output. As long as the customer receives 231 cubic inches of fuel, they contend, the customer is getting what they paid for.

The fuel industry also says the cost of installing temperature adjustment equipment would be prohibitive. NATSO, a trade group that represents truck stop operators, has estimated the cost of equipping each pump at between \$1,500 and \$3,800.

But the plaintiffs point out that the petroleum industry has pushed for using these adjustments in Canada, where the temperature difference favors the consumer rather than the seller.

In denying a motion by the defendants to dismiss the case, Judge Vratil moves the case to the discovery stage.

Feds gives S.C. OK to start building Interstate 73

MYRTLE BEACH, S.C. — The U.S. Department of Transportation has given South Carolina the go-ahead to move forward with plans to build Interstate 73.

The approval came with the USDOT acceptance of environmental documents for the project.

With federal clearances in place, South Carolina can take the next step to explore financing options to start constructing the new section of interstate.

Peters said I-73 in South Carolina is the first project to have a slot reserved under the department's new Interstate System Construction Toll Pilot Program, which gives the state authority to toll the new roadway and allows other states to expand I-73.

"The I-73 corridor will be a critical link tying the Grand Strand to states to the north," said USDOT Deputy Transportation Secretary Thomas Barrett said. "It will

expand the region's economy, increase tourism and enable faster trips to the region."

The Grand Strand, also known as Long Bay, refers to a stretch of beaches extending from Calabash, N.C. to Georgetown, S.C. It consists of 60-plus miles along an essentially uninterrupted arc of beach land. The Grand Strand has become a major tourist attraction along the southeastern coast, with its primary city, Myrtle Beach,

attracting more than 10 million visitors annually.

Currently, I-73 only exists as a 26-mile stretch along U.S. Route 220 in North Carolina. However, it is part of a longer planned corridor, defined by various federal laws to run from Myrtle Beach to Sault Ste. Marie, Mich.

"Once completed (in South Carolina), the new interstate will allow drivers to connect more easily to I-95," Barrett noted.

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rather than modify the Series 60 to comply.

However, adapting the new engine to a wide range of motorcoach platforms would have added even more costs and the payback would have been slow.

The fact of the matter is that the motorcoach industry is a fly on the elephant that is the on-highway engine market. In a decent year, the North American motorcoach industry consumes 2,400-2,500 diesel engines. There are individual trucking companies in the U.S. that buy that many engines in a couple of years.

That is the fundamental reason why Caterpillar and Cummins have run hot and cold on the coach industry over the past 20 years. But, as of today, with Detroit Diesel bailing out, those two engine makers have the inside track to become the industry's leading power plant suppliers, with Prevost Car using engines built by its parent company, AB Volvo.

Prevost has been busy for months building a service network for its coaches equipped with Volvo engines.

And MCI, for the better part of a year, has been emphasizing the availability of Cummins engines in

its coaches, along with Cat. And Van Hool has a long relationship with both Cummins and Caterpillar.

Caterpillar is the standard engine in BCI Falcon coaches and Blue Bird over-the-road buses.

When Prevost announced last month it had been notified by Detroit Diesel that Daimler AG planned to discontinue selling engines to companies outside the Daimler family, the Canadian coach builder said it had received assurances from Detroit Diesel that it would fully support all Prevost vehicles equipped with Detroit engines "now and in the future." Prevost noted it had even signed agreements with Detroit Diesel to that effect.

"It is unfortunate that Daimler has decided to take some of the choices away from coach owners and operators in North America," Prevost added.

Detroit Diesel even has cancelled its booth space at Motorcoach Expo 2009 in Orlando.

Prevost said that as a consequence of Detroit Diesel's decision it was accelerating its strategy "to offer Volvo engines to the various coach markets we serve.

"Prevost is in a unique position among bus manufacturers in North America due to the fact our parent

company is AB Volvo. Volvo is the leading heavy-duty diesel engine manufacturer in the world," Prevost noted.

Bryan Couch, vice president of product development at MCI, said his company is committed to providing its customers with the broadest choices of powertrain combinations "to safeguard market fluctuations and provide operators with the best technology the market offers.

"We will continue to do our part to ensure that our customers' needs are met while working within the global dynamics of an ever evolving marketplace. With the successful launch of the industry's widest offering of powertrain combinations that meet the 2007 EPA requirements, our energies are now focused on meeting this challenge with our engine suppliers for the 2010 emission standards, which are even more stringent.

"MCI is also the first coach manufacturer to offer a hybrid alternative with first deliveries going to the Houston Metro transit authority, using the Cummins/Allison combination. We anticipate growth in application of this fuel efficient powertrain combination."

Some observers believe the 2010 emissions standards could trigger additional fallout — of the Detroit Diesel nature — during the

Onboard diagnostic system to complicate 2010 engines

When engine manufacturers introduce even more stringent emissions-control technology on their 2010 engines they also will be adding sophisticated new onboard diagnostic systems.

The driving force behind the new diagnostics is the same one behind the new engines: government mandates.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency wants to be sure that when the 2010 engines hit the road they will keep emissions low during the course of their useful life.

And the way to assure that is to require the adoption of certified onboard diagnostic systems for the engines and their fuel and after-treatment systems.

With onboard diagnostic systems, a computer will alert the driver when any problem arises, electrical or mechanical, that could impact emissions levels.

The California Air Resources Board originally created onboard

next couple of years.

At the same time, the engine equation in buying a new coach appears to have receded in importance in recent years as all engines

diagnostic system rules for passenger vehicles and now they will be adopted by diesel engine manufacturers for over-the-road buses and trucks.

The systems to be monitored by the onboard diagnostics include the crankcase vent, fuel, exhaust gas recirculation, boost-pressure control, particulate filter, cooling, and NOx reduction catalyst. Requirements for the systems include:

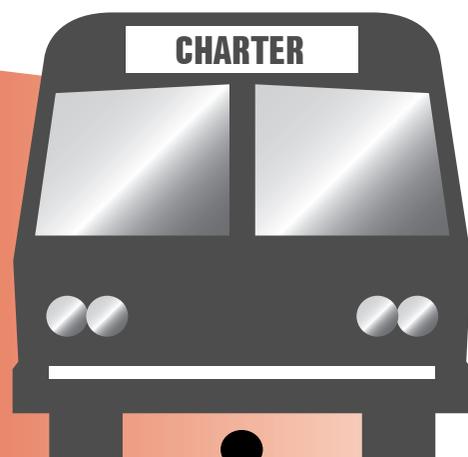
- The system must have an operator interface, called a malfunction indicator lamp, that exclusively indicates emissions faults.

- Service information must be adequate to guide a technician to the condition causing the problem and must be available to any service provider at reasonable cost.

Engine makers generally agree that while onboard diagnostic systems will assure emissions compliance, it also will make troubleshooting complicated.

have become more bullet proof. There undoubtedly will be operators that buy a particular coach based on engine availability, but not as many as in the past.

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Survey: Lousy nighttime vision is widespread problem

A nationwide survey has found that millions of American drivers have faulty night vision... and some of them may work for you.

Nearly one of three drivers surveyed say they have difficulty seeing all or most of the time while driving in the dark, according to "Shedding Light on Driving in the Dark," a nationwide study conducted by Kelton Research on behalf of *Road & Travel Magazine* and ACUVUE brand contact lenses.

Of further concern, while most believe that correcting their vision problems would improve their ability to drive in low-light conditions, many have never talked to an eye-care professional about treatment options.

More than one-fourth of those surveyed report they have trouble

seeing signs or exits; one-fifth acknowledged difficulty seeing animals or pedestrians, and one-fifth also reported having difficulty seeing turns in the road. Twenty-two percent reported problems in judging distance while driving in the dark.

A total of 515 vision-corrected Americans aged 18 and over participated in the survey. Nearly a quarter of the respondents expressed concern and a lack of confidence about their driving skills in the dark. Vision problems and discomfort also leave more than 20 percent feeling concerned and unsafe behind the wheel.

"Driving in the dark is one of the most hazardous situations faced by a driver," said Courtney Caldwell, founder and editor-in-

chief of *Road & Travel Magazine*. "Roads with low or no lighting, glare from headlights and fluctuations in vision are contributing factors to the disproportionately high rate of accidents and fatalities that occur between dusk and dawn."

Both the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the National Safety Council say the fatality rate at night (6 p.m.-6 a.m.) is three times higher than the daytime rate.

Respondents complained of eyestrain (38 percent), dry or tired eyes (34 percent), fatigue (25 percent), headaches (19 percent), inability to focus (18 percent), and double or blurred vision (15 percent) while driving in the dark.

More than six in 10 (61 percent) say headlights from oncom-

ing traffic or from vehicles behind them are particularly bothersome, and nearly half (48 percent) report experiencing glare or light sensitivity while driving in the dark.

"Low light levels cause an eye's pupil to dilate, which can accentuate any existing focusing problems and result in blurred vision," said a Los Angeles optometrist. "This is particularly common among people with astigmatism because the shape of the cornea prevents light from focusing properly on the retina, often leading to blurred vision, which can impair a driver's speed of visual reaction time and affect the abil-

ity to quickly identify and localize possible hazards on the road."

Alarming, while 73 percent of respondents believe that correcting their vision problems could improve their night-time driving, only 27 percent have ever consulted an eye care professional about treatments or products that could improve their vision while driving in the dark.

Any vision problem left uncorrected or under-corrected can result in tragic consequences. A comprehensive eye exam will include testing to diagnose potential problems and determine the correct form of treatment.

Blind woman files abuse lawsuits

NEW YORK CITY — An appeals court decision, involving a blind woman who says she was mocked by workers in fast-food restaurants, is a fresh reminder that employees frequently need to be reminded about — or retrained in — handling individuals with disabilities.

When the woman, who is legally blind, was mistreated by employees at several restaurants she filed suit against four restaurants under the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act.

The restaurant workers apparently became irritated when she asked them to read menus to her, with employees at one establishment even directing her to a men's restroom and then laughing at her embarrassment, she claims.

The 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals here reinstated Alice Camarillo's lawsuit last month, dis-

missing a lower court judge's ruling that she suffered no harm because she was always allowed to eat at the restaurants.

The appeals court judges said Camarillo sufficiently claimed the restaurants failed to ensure "effective communication" of their menus.

In her suit, Camarillo said the restaurants near her home in the small upstate community of Catskill do not have large-print menus that she can read. She said that when she asked workers to read her the menu items, they sometimes made fun of her, or stared at her, or forced her to wait until customers behind her were served.

Camarillo made the claims against Burger King restaurants in Catskill and Hudson, N.Y., McDonald's restaurants in Catskill and Cairo, N.Y., a McDonald's in

Hudson; a Taco Bell restaurant in Kingston, N.Y., and a Wendy's in Hudson.

The appeals court said restaurants are not necessarily required to have large-print menus on hand, but they must ensure that menu options are effectively communicated to legally blind individuals.

The appeals panel said it did not disagree with the lower court's finding that federal antidiscrimination rules cannot ensure workers will never be rude or insensitive to people with disabilities.

"Camarillo alleges more than mere rudeness or insensitivity, and more than one or two isolated mistakes," the panel of judges wrote. "Rather, a reasonable inference to be drawn from her complaint is that defendants failed to adopt policies or procedures to effectively train their employees how to deal with disabled individuals."

Motorcoach travel ranked least stressful mode in UK

Research — of a sort — in the United Kingdom has found that travel by motorcoach is less stressful than going by plane, train or automobile.

With the aid of digital blood monitors, four female researchers used planes, Eurostar trains, cars, and motorcoaches to get from the United Kingdom to Disneyland in Paris.

They measured their blood pressure rates at various points in the journey and came to the conclusion that using a coach is, in fact, the least stressful experience. They believe that coach passengers are more relaxed than users of other modes of transport.

The research was carried out by travel magazine *TTG* and Leger Holidays, a British tour company.

One travel Website thought it surprising that the quicker air travel was not considered the most comfortable and least stressful. However, air travel turned out to be the second most stressful way of

traveling.

This coincides with other surveys in the United Kingdom which have indicated that 77 percent of passengers feel stressed, rushed or worried at airports, especially those travelers with children and retired individuals.

These surveys also found that many airline passengers have obsessive tendencies, such as checking travel documents at least four times before take off. Fifty-seven percent of passengers admitted being worried about missing a flight or being late.

Using privately-owned vehicles was third place on the stress travel list, while the gold medal for stressless traveling went to the motorcoach.

"It is rather logical as waiting times are rare, passengers tend to sleep and changing is also rare. Thus, for relaxing and carefree journeys, the coach seems to be the way forward," reported the travel Website, www.tourism-review.com.

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ISSUE NO. 119

New worry: Assuring drug testing collection compliance

Here's an issue that may not be on your radar screen but probably should:

Is the occupational health clinic or other organization you use to collect specimens for employee drug tests qualified? Are the collection personnel properly trained? Do they get refresher and error-correction training? Do they keep current on the rules governing drug testing procedures?

And, are you aware of this?

Employers that must comply with federal drug screening regulations are required to possess documentation confirming the competency of specimen collection personnel with respect to a whole range of requirements, including qualification training, proficiency and rules.

Federal rules require that occupational health clinics and other collection sites be prepared to produce written evidence of collector qualifications upon request.

Additionally, the rules say an employer's "good faith use of a collector that is not qualified is no excuse and cannot serve as a defense to an enforcement action by the U.S. Department of Transportation or in an action by a former job applicant or employee.

"There have been many reported cases throughout the country of employees who have tested positive for illicit drug use but who get their jobs back because the collector was not qualified or did not have proof that they were," reports William Judge, a Chicago-area attorney who specializes in workplace drug testing regulations.

In November, a House subcommittee held a hearing to discuss the seeming lack of compliance with collector mandates, which went into effect five years ago. (See Dec. 1 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.) The hearing was prompted by a report in which a Minneapolis television station found that four of five collection sites visited by undercover reporters failed to properly collect specimens or have proof of collector training.

Taking up where the television station left off, investigators for the Government Accountability Office, the investigation arm of Congress, set up dummy companies to probe specimen collection sites.

Twenty-two of the 24 sites investigated by the government failed at least two required collection requirements. The GAO is expected to issue a full investigative report in May.

"That report will show that during the GAO's own undercover investigation, the 24 sites investigated showed flaws in all phases of the testing protocols," said Judge.

"During the question-and-answer portion of the hearing, training and having proof of training were mentioned as important solutions to many of the problems uncovered by the GAO," said Judge. "In response to the hearing, many employers and third-party administrators are now taking steps to ensure that collectors have proof of training."

The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration has indicated it intends to investigate ways to step up enforcement of qualification and procedural rules for specimen collection organizations. And FMCSA Administrator John Hill reportedly has asked Congress for the authority to fine collection sites and employers for non-compliance.

Meanwhile, Judge and his col-

leagues have established the National Qualified Collector Registry, which is designed "to help all parties achieve regulatory compliance in a relatively painless fashion."

The Collector Registry functions as a site auditor and lists qualified collectors on its Website: www.collectorregistry.com.

Once a provider location has completed an initial audit, any new

personnel who become qualified as collection staff may be registered as soon as they complete and document their training.

Access to the registry is free for employers.

Judge says the registry simplifies the compliance process by eliminating the need for employers and third-party administrators to obtain individual credentials by fax.



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45-foot coaches: It's about flexibility, cost savings

By Dave Millhouser
ABC Companies

Our charter customer had cleverly figured out that 70 percent of our coaches were 46-passenger. They'd order a 39-seater, assuming they'd get the bigger bus and save the difference in cost.

Wrong. And now seven people were going to have to take turns prowling the aisle all the way from the East Coast to Colorado. This was 1971, but customers haven't changed much.

Coaches are bigger these days, so the new weasel factor is 57 to 49. The major difference is that these seating capacities both require three-axle buses.

Assuming you do have some smaller groups, is it worthwhile mixing 40- and 45-foot coaches in your fleet?

A few operators think so because most manufacturers still offer 40/41-foot coaches. They sell just enough to make it worth the effort.

40-foot advantages

There are still venues, primar-

ily in the West, that don't allow 45-foot vehicles. Operators whose groups don't exceed 49 passengers like the added maneuverability of the shorter bus, and the fact its rear end is less of a "street sweeper" on tight turns. In addition, the purchase price of a 40-foot coach is measurably less than a 45-footer.

If you have long-term commitments that only require 49-passenger capacity, the initial savings (and your ability to use that money elsewhere) makes the shorter coach attractive. Charter and tour passengers tend to prefer a bus that is reasonably full; they don't want to be rattling around in a cavernous coach.

On the other hand, the 45-foot bus offers a number of advantages, beyond the obvious extra capacity.

Since both vehicles require big engines, transmissions and three axles, they cost nearly the same to build. The five feet the manufacturer adds is seats and baggage storage, the least costly part of a bus to build. You don't save that much buying a 40-footer.

The 45-foot coach does weigh more but the frontal area is the

same. The 40-footer should provide some operating economies in low-speed operation, but on the highway wind resistance on both coaches is about the same. You're not going to save a lot of fuel.

Doing it all

A 45-foot bus offers more per/passenger baggage space because you've added approximately 33 percent more under-floor capacity, but only 20 percent more passengers. (Alright, my math is fuzzy but you get it). On some transfers, space is more important than seats.

The big coach will do everything the small one will but not vice versa. This flexibility is reflected in the higher resale value that 45-foot buses command.

There's an obvious economy in having one driver able to transport more passengers. With the current shortage of good drivers, some manufacturers are looking at ways of increasing capacity even further.

Some European countries are permitting coaches up to 49 feet. Currently, the U.S. limits length to

45 feet, and this is unlikely to change in the near future. In addition, until lighter construction comes along, the current 45-foot coaches are about as heavy as federal law allows.

An alternative is the double-deck coach. They've operated in the U.S. successfully, in the past, and one manufacturer currently offers them here. A single coach seats 80 passengers. Most are on the upper deck in a pretty nifty environment, and downstairs is like a club.

Want even more seats?

The double-decker is ideal for certain types of work but comes with a couple of caveats. Improved design and technology has gotten height down to 13-feet, but there are still places they can't go. Routing and driver training are critical.

The design limits the amount of baggage space available, making them problematic for trips where customers carry much luggage.

Technology will march along. Lighter materials, improved sus-

pension and steering will come into the market, and it's likely that even larger coaches will eventually be available.

Bigger buses offer an extra potential for entertainment. On one of these Colorado trips, at a stop, one kid left the bus AFTER having been counted back on. We left him and didn't notice he was gone for eight hours. (I guess he wasn't that popular).

Once the appropriate state of panic set in, we tracked him down to where he'd hitchhiked... Utah. Asked why he hadn't hitched to Colorado, he said he'd "gone with the flow."

I figure, the more seats you have, the more potential for fun stories.

Dave Millhouser is a marketing consultant for ABC Companies. Contact him at: dave_millhouser@hotmail.com.



Dave Millhouser



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Coach USA/Canada revenue climbs during latest quarter

PERTH, Scotland — Revenue growth at Coach USA and Coach Canada picked up during November, December and January, but lagged behind other divisions of their parent company, Stagecoach Group PLC.

For the nine months ended Jan. 31, revenue at Coach USA/Coach Canada increased 4.2 percent above the same period a year earlier.

For the first six months of the Coach USA/Coach Canada fiscal year, revenue grew at a more modest 3 percent.

In announcing the interim results, Stagecoach Group did not comment on the specific financial performance of Coach USA/Coach

Nat'l Interstate has record year, boosts dividend

RICHFIELD, Ohio — Strong price competition in the motorcoach industry insurance market held down earnings at National Interstate Corporation during the fourth quarter of last year.

Still, the board of National Interstate approved a 20 percent increase in the company dividend. The board declared a 6-cents-per-share dividend, payable March 14, to shareholders of record Feb. 29.

National Interstate, parent company of the No. 2 insurer of motorcoaches, said it earned \$11.1 million, or 57 cents per diluted share, during the fourth quarter of last year, compared to net income of \$11.4 million, or 59 cents per diluted share, for the final quarter of 2006.

The unusual timing of the renewal of several large policies in the fourth quarter of 2006 and continued price competition in the fourth quarter of 2007 produced the earnings dip.

Business, however, remained strong with gross premiums written totaling \$71.1 million in the 2007 fourth quarter, 15.6 percent above the \$61.5 million reported in the 2006 fourth quarter.

For all of 2007, net income at National Interstate totaled \$43.6 million, or \$2.25 per diluted share, up 22.1 percent from the \$35.7 million, or \$1.85 per diluted share, earned in 2006.

Gross premiums written last year totaled \$346 million, an increase of 13.3 percent from the \$305.5 million in premiums written in 2006.

All of the results are within the preliminary earnings range announced by National Interstate earlier this year and reported in the Feb. 15 issue of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.

Canada. However, it did note that Stagecoach's overall growth was "at the top end of management's expectations."

The other principal divisions of Stagecoach Group performed well during the nine months ended late January-early February. Revenue growth looked like this:

- United Kingdom rail group up 14 percent
- Virgin rail group up 12.4 percent

- UK bus group up 7.4 percent

Stagecoach also said its latest financial results benefited from gains resulting from resolving several lingering tax disputes, and

reassessing liabilities tied to business disposals and litigation risks.

In total, getting those issues resolved produced an exceptional post-tax gain of roughly \$207 million (105 British pounds).

"We are encouraged with the current trading performance of the group and, whilst we remain mind-

ful of macroeconomic developments and of continuing cost pressures, such as increased fuel prices, the outlook remains positive," Stagecoach said.

That statement was enough to send Stagecoach Group shares higher in trading on the London stock exchange.

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Overtime suit

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

the exemption have been filed from time to time over the years.

Despite the challenges, the exemption generally prevails throughout the U.S. There are states, however, where operators pay drivers overtime because of state rules.

Under Section 13(b)(1) of the Fair Labor Standards Act, federal overtime pay requirements are not supposed to apply to employees whose qualifications and hours of service are regulated by the U.S. Secretary of Transportation.

The secretary of transportation, through the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, has the power to regulate employees of motor carriers whose duties affect safety on the highways when

either interstate passenger travel or interstate shipment of property is involved.

To establish that an employee is covered by the motor carrier exemption, the employer must show that (1) the employer is a motor carrier, and (2) that the activities of the employee affect highway safety, and (3) that the employee's activities involve the interstate transportation of people or goods for compensation.

Here are three key factors used in determining if an operator is an exempt motor carrier:

1. An employer is a motor carrier if it operates commercial motor vehicles and is paid for it. Commercial motor vehicles are those that have a GVWR of at least 10,001 pounds or that transport more than 8 passengers, and are

used in a "for-hire" business.

2. Drivers are employees whose activities affect highway safety. Mechanics who are responsible for maintaining buses in safe operating condition also affect highway safety, but courts have determined that other employees, such as dispatchers, are not covered under the exemption.

3. The exemption applies only if the motor carrier engages in interstate transportation. If your company does not provide interstate activity or charter trips, the exemption cannot be used.

What is somewhat less obvious is which drivers may be exempt and for what periods. The most conservative determination is that any driver who takes an interstate trip is exempt for the week in which the trip occurred. And the mechanic who worked on the bus that went out of state is exempt for that week as well.

But the U.S. Supreme Court has upheld a more liberal interpretation that says when interstate travel is an integral part of the employer's service, even though it may be a very small portion of the business, and when any driver can be assigned to an interstate trip, then all drivers are exempt from overtime as a class. However,

another court decision determined that drivers who never engage in exempt activities cannot be considered part of the class.

In determining whether to pay overtime to drivers and mechanics, the main question that an operator should ask is: "Is this driver eligible for out-of-state trips?" If the answer is "no" — that he or she is under 21, for example, or has opted out of such trips — then he or she is not exempt and the operator must pay overtime for any hours over 40 in a week.

If the answer is "yes," then

those drivers — regardless of how often they actually go out of state — are exempt from overtime pay.

For more information about the exemption, go to www.wage-hour.dol.gov and scroll down to the Quick Finder heading about midway down the page. Go to Fact Sheets and click on the down arrow next to the word Choose. Then click on Numeric Index. Scroll down to Fact Sheet No. 19.

Information also is available by calling the Department of Labor toll-free wage-hour helpline, (866) 487-9243.

Coach America credit rating cut

NEW YORK — Standard & Poor's Ratings Services has cut the corporate credit rating of Coach America Holdings to 'B-' with a negative outlook from 'B.'

In making the cut, S&P cited expectations of a weaker than expected financial profile at least over the near term.

Standard & Poor's also lowered

its senior secured debt ratings on the company to 'B', one notch above the corporate credit rating.

It said while the company is undertaking various actions to improve its operating performance, the results will be seen only over time. However, the rating agency said it believes management initiatives will result in improved results over time.

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MCI plans one-week plant shutdown, production slowdown

WINNIPEG, Manitoba — Motor Coach Industries is shutting down its Winnipeg plant for a week next month and laying off workers in the wake of a slowdown in orders for motorcoaches.

Pat Plodzeen, spokeswoman for MCI, said the plant will be

closed April 21-25.

On April 28, production of the company's J-model coaches will be reduced from two units a week to one unit. An undetermined number of workers will be laid off during the next few months, as well.

"This is a direct result of the

current market conditions in the United States and hopefully, in the near term, the market demand will improve," said Plodzeen.

She noted that tour and charter companies are worried about how the economic slowdown in the U.S. will impact their businesses.

"We've been through this before where there's been a downturn, and then, there is an upturn. Once orders pick up, production will pick up as well."

So far, the decline in orders has only been for E- and J-model coaches, which are manufactured

in Winnipeg. Orders for the firm's D models haven't been affected.

The Winnipeg plant manufactures the D-model shells, which are finished at the company's assembly plant in Pembina, N.D. No layoffs or cuts are currently planned at the Pembina plant.

MCI launches Web catalog in 3-D format

SCHAUMBURG, Ill. — Motor Coach Industries has unveiled a sophisticated online parts catalog that includes 3-D imaging and new features designed to make parts ordering for late-model J4500 coaches much simpler.

Catalog users will not only find 3-D images of the coach, but multi-dimensional images of body, chassis, electrical system, air and brake systems, and drain train components as well. The images also are maneuverable.

Navigating through systems and parts is done via dialogue boxes.

Once a customer decides on the part he or she needs it can be placed in an electronic shopping cart to start an order that can be fulfilled through the MCI Parts Store.

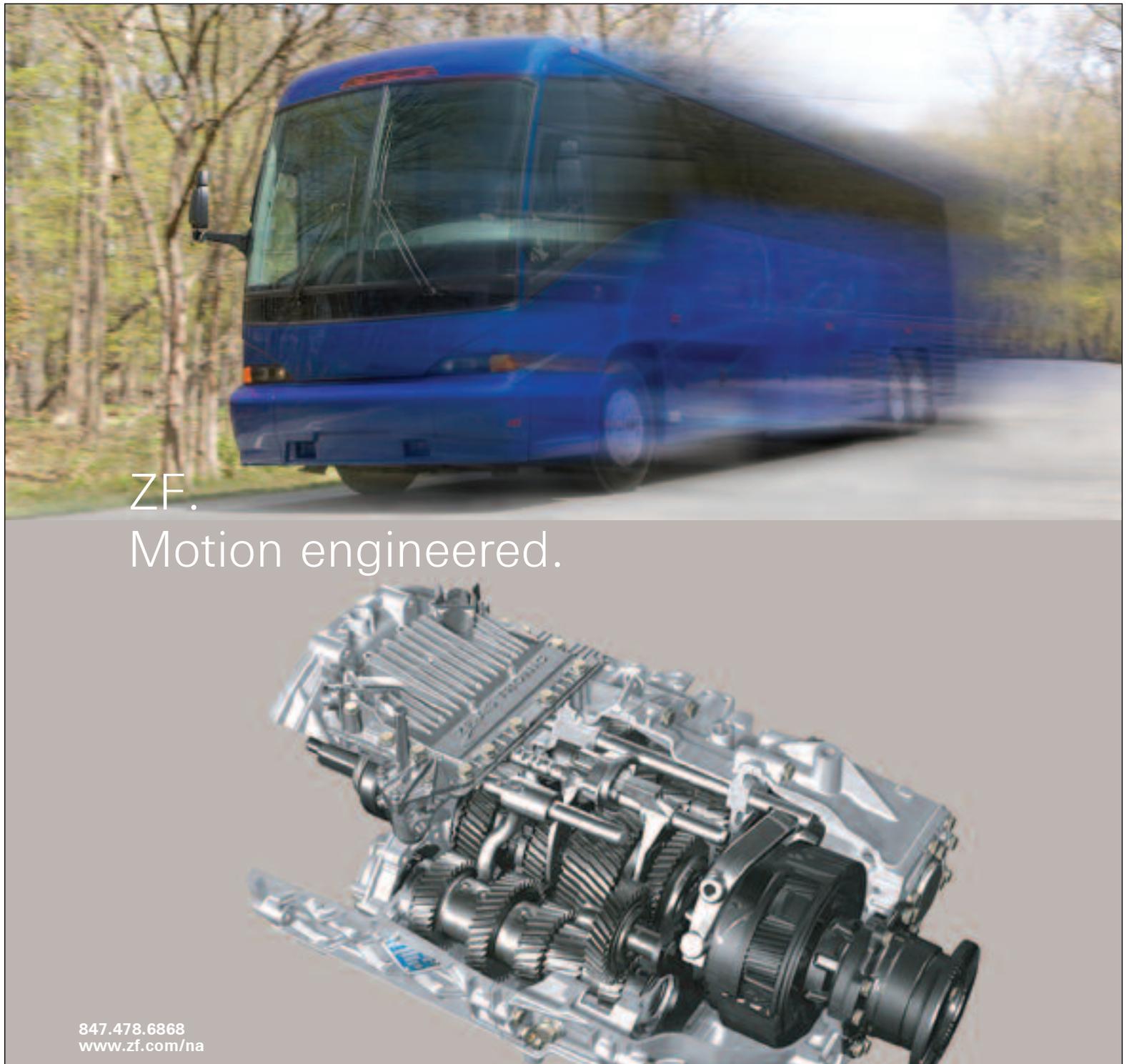
Michael Anstead, MCI's director of technical services, says operators should find the 3-D aspects, that allow them to turn and flip images for a closer look, useful. Plus, the search function is easy and convenient.

"All an operator has to do is type in a keyword and then just click on the part that matches what they're looking for," said Anstead.

While the new system is for 2007 and 2008 J4500 coaches, MCI is considering expanding the technology to include D-model buses. Customer response will help determine further development.

Operators having older J4500s or other models should continue to use MCI's existing catalogs, which are available in PDF format, Anstead noted.

Customers will still need to have an account to use the online catalog, which can be set up by calling an MCI Pro Support representative at (800) 323-1290 in the U.S. and (800) 665-0155 in Canada.



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Rules changes

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

receive for providing transportation services during emergencies.

"Although the petitioners do not oppose the change to allow transit agencies to respond with charter bus service to declared emergencies, it is extremely rare that emergency conditions requiring transit bus charter service will last for one and one-half months," the group emphasized.

Such an expansion, it cautioned, could lead to transit agencies avoiding reporting requirements for extended periods of time by claiming to provide emergency service.

Targeted, too, is a section that allows transit agencies to seek exemptions to the rule when providing charter serve in rural areas or in urbanized areas with a popu-

lation of less than 200,000. The exemption would be triggered if a private carrier interested in doing the work requires a minimum trip duration or its deadhead time exceeds the total trip time.

The group asks that the urbanized area be removed from the rule and that it only apply to rural communities.

At the same time, in a separate filing, the American Bus Association went after provisions that require private operators that receive certain types of FTA funds to abide by the charter rule themselves.

The ABA calls that section unclear and in conflict with other parts of the rule. It maintains that an effort by the FTA to explain details of the provision in the question-and-answer section of the rule creates even further confusion that should be clarified.

willing to provide charter service, ranging from the entire United States to individual states and cities.

Operators that are on the list will be notified by e-mail whenever a transit agency in their service area wants to handle a charter job that it is not allowed to do without first offering the work to private carriers.

To read the rules, go to www.fta.dot.gov/laws/leg_reg_179.html.

Registration

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

requires your company name and address, contact information (including e-mail, which will be used for charter opportunity notifications), Federal Motor Carrier identification number, and the number of buses and vans in the company's fleet.

In addition, operators will have to choose the areas in which they are

Blue Bird completes sale to GSA

FORT VALLEY, Ga. — Blue Bird Coachworks has sold and delivered 11 40-foot Express Coaches to Federal Prison Industries in Terra Haute, Ind.

The General Services Administration, which acts as purchasing agent for the federal prison system and other units of the U.S. Government, has become a primary customer target for Complete Coach Works since it bought Blue Bird Coachworks last July.

"Blue Bird Express Coaches

were chosen by the GSA for their craftsmanship, price and the location of manufacturing facilities," said Macy Neshati, vice president of sales and marketing at Blue Bird Coachworks. "Blue Bird Coachworks manufactures all of its coaches at its facility in Fort Valley, enabling us to offer a quality USA-made product in compliance with all provisions stipulated in the Buy America Act."

"We are committed to building on the legacy of Blue Bird with a

"There is no reason to require private operators who might receive some FTA funding to go through this tortured analysis to determine if a vehicle or an activity or a service is sufficiently tainted with FTA money to subject the

operator to the charter rule," the ABA said in its filing.

To fix the problem, the ABA suggested private operators be exempt from the rule in all cases except when the carrier has acquired a coach with 80 percent

quality product and impeccable service," said Neshati. "GSA is an avenue in which we can exemplify ... that great manufacturing facilities still exist in the United States."

The Blue Express Coach is available in either 40- or 45-foot versions with a wide variety of seating configurations. While it is primarily targeted for the commuter, bus rapid transit and government markets, it also has application for the tour, charter, sightseeing and shuttle markets.

or more in federal funds.

Coach USA also filed a separate petition for reconsideration of the provisions that govern private carriers that do work for transit agencies and operate college shuttle services.

Calendar

APRIL 2008

2 Pennsylvania Bus Association 2008 Marketplace, Pennsylvania Farm Show Complex, Harrisburg. Info: www.pabus.org, or call (717) 236-9042.

2-4 National Tour Operator Spring Meet, Mohegan Sun,

Uncasville, Conn. Info: Go to www.nta.travel.

9-13 Heritage Clubs International 24th Annual Peer Group Travel Conference, Holiday Inn Select, Bloomington, Minn. Info: www.heritageclubs.com, or call (877) 881-0229.

13 Eastern Bus Maintenance Management Conference, East Elmhurst, N.Y. Info: Go to www.ebmmc.org.

17-19 Tourism Cares for America, Louis Armstrong Park, New Orleans. Info: Go to www.tourismcares.org, or call (781) 821-5990.

JUNE 2008

17-20 Pennsylvania Bus Association 2008 Annual Meeting, Sheraton Atlantic City. Info: Go to www.pabus.org, or call (717) 236-9042.




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A remembrance of Amaya/Astron's 'Pepe' Gea

Early last month, the popular "face" of Amaya/Astron Seating in the United States and Canada, 'Pepe' Gea, died. His colleague George Farrell, has written this remembrance.

* * *

His given name was Jose Antonio Gea Gonzalez.

But everyone knew him simply as 'Pepe.'

Pepe passed away unexpectedly on Feb. 3rd. His passing was a shock to everyone in our industry and especially to his family and personal friends who knew him best.

When anyone mentioned Amaya/Astron Seating, the first name mentioned was Pepe.

Will Rogers, the famous humorist and newspaper columnist from Oklahoma, once said: "I never met a man I didn't like." I can truly say I never met a person who didn't like Pepe. If you ever had a disagreement with Pepe, an hour later at lunch or dinner you forgot about your differences and just enjoyed his company.

Pepe was only 47 years old and had lived life to the fullest.

He was married to his wife, Pili, for 25 years. They met at age 14 and never separated. Pepe always said the only things he could give his children were love and a good education. I know for sure Pepe succeeded in both of these goals.

He has four beautiful children, Pili, 24, an industrial designer with her own design studio; Jose Antonio, 22, a communications major who is also now in charge of marketing of a home supplies company; Tais, 21, a sister with the Legionaries of Christ, lives in Madrid; and Santiago, 18, is about to finish high school and is an amateur soccer player.

The first time Darrell Niswander and I saw Pepe, he was one of our seating competitors. We were at BusCon and we noticed, across the room, a man standing on an airline-style food tray, mounted on the back of an Amaya/Astron Seat. I asked, "who is that crazy Mexican?"

A year later, Darrell and I were hired by that crazy Mexican. This turned out to be a blessing, and I will always be thankful to Pepe.



Pepe Gea of Amaya.

'Pepe always tried to fulfill any request no matter how big or small.'

Pepe never wanted to be considered a boss, but only as a member of our sales team. That was what was so special about Pepe; in my opinion, his philosophy made our company successful. Over the past 10 years, Amaya/Astron Seat-

ing became the leader in the U.S. and Canada for seat sales in new coaches.

As a team effort, Amaya/Astron Seating was awarded the Greyhound "Vendor of the Year" award in 2000.

Pepe had a hard time saying "no" to anyone. He always tried to fulfill any request no matter how big or small from the coach manufacturers and, in turn, the final coach customer.

The UMA Motorcoach Expo will never be the same without our friend Pepe. Tequila shots were given to everyone, no matter if they were customers or competitors, who stopped by our booth. It was a tradition that everyone looked forward to and really enjoyed.

Several years ago, I talked Pepe into learning the game of golf. I knew he finally had become acclimated to this demanding sport when, after hitting a bad shot, he started to swear in Spanish and finally in English. Pepe loved the game and everyone loved playing in Pepe's foursome.

I have been in this business for about 35 years, and have never met

a person that had such an affect on all the people around him. Adjectives cannot do justice to this fine and compassionate human being that we have lost. I called him my younger brother.

Pepe's wife, Pili, wrote to me: "We were the luckiest family on earth for having him as a husband and father. He will live in our hearts, and we will miss him forever." Those of us who had the pleasure of working with Pepe share the family's sense of loss and will miss his warm and contagious smile and the friendship we shared.

We wish Pepe and his family peace. It is too hard to say goodbye, Pepe, so until we meet again, we want to let you know you will always be in our thoughts and prayers.

For those who knew Pepe only by name, and not personally, I hope I have conveyed his personality so you can say you knew him. He was an exceptional person and family man.

So long my friend. We will all miss you.

— George Farrell

The advertisement is a large, textured graphic with a light beige background. It features several 3D-rendered bus seats in different colors and styles. The seats are arranged in a grid-like pattern. Text labels are placed around the seats: "2+1 BRASIL" (top left), "TORINO STANDARD" (top right), "TORINO VIP" (middle left), "Patriot" (bottom left), and "FEATURES" (bottom right). At the bottom center, the text reads "THE BEST OPTION FOR YOU." The bottom of the advertisement contains contact information for Amaya/Astron Seating and its North American distributors.

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Noel Patterson, Dave Millhouser hang up sales spurs

Two legendary motorcoach industry salesmen have ridden into retirement. But coach industry sales careers is not the only thing the pair have in common.

Early in their professional lives, Dave Millhouser and Noel Patterson worked for Young Life, a non-denominational Christian group that once had a fleet of buses.

They also were co-workers at Hausman Bus Sales in Pitman, N.J., living a few blocks apart, and from time to time roomed together in Chicago and Colorado.

Patterson says he met Millhouser while driving a Young Life bus to Florida. "I picked up my relief driver," Patterson recalls, "and it was Dave."

Though their careers took them to various jobs throughout the country, they remained good friends and friendly competitors. They also shared a common trait — as salesmen they considered themselves more like consultants.

* * *

What goes around, comes around, and for Noel Patterson, it is his yearning to be a musician.

Patterson, 69, who retired as Midwestern regional sales manager for Prevost Car, says his interest in music actually led to a career in the motorcoach industry.

"When I got out of high school I was working my way through college (the University of Omaha) as a musician," Patterson says.

He was playing tenor saxophone at the time when a member of Count Basie's band started his own nine-piece group and needed a tenor sax man.

Patterson dropped out of school and joined the band.

"We used to drive around the country in a pony cruiser and I did some of the driving," he says. "That was my first taste of driving a bus."

Did it taste pretty good?

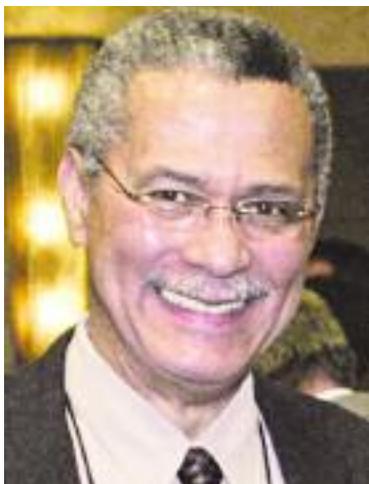
"Let's just say it was interesting," he responds.

From S.F. to N.J.

Patterson started working for Greyhound Lines in 1967, based in San Francisco. The job only lasted about seven months before he was laid off, and moved to New Mexico and then to Colorado Springs where he was hired by Colorado Springs Coach Co.

It was in Colorado Springs that Patterson met Joe Shelly, manager of Young Life Transport, a subsidiary of Young Life, a Christian group. He was with Young Life from 1968 to 1975, when he went to work for Hausman Bus Sales in New Jersey as shop foreman.

Later, he was shop foreman for Romano Bus Service in Norris-



Noel Patterson

town, Pa. The firm operated 265 school buses, and several tractor trailers and vans. A few more stops before Patterson landed at Eagle Bus Manufacturing in May 1982, as a technical representative. Three years later he got into sales for Eagle, where he remained until 1990, when he landed a sales job with Prevost Car.

As a salesman, Patterson says, "I always felt the first thing you need to do is win (the customer's) confidence. After that, you figure they want to be a part of what you're all about. You listen a lot to establish relationships. That's it in a nutshell."

One other key aspect.

"Always be honest with people," he says. "I'm glad I worked for Prevost because they allowed me to do that."

Shooting straight

Because motorcoaches today cost nearly \$500,000, Patterson says, "You've got to be straight with your customers. They need to know they can always count on you. Any problems or issues, you've got to be available to solve them. The key — never let your customer down."

In some ways the motorcoach industry has changed and in others it has not.

"Motorcoaches are a better val-

ue today than ever," says Patterson.

He tells of a customer who bought a bus in the 1960s for \$40,000. The man's father told him he could have purchased two good houses for that price, Patterson recalls.

"Today, nothing has changed," he says. "For \$500,000, you can still buy two good houses. Proportionately, it's the same as it was in those days."

But the differences are numerous. Today's buses are bigger, safer, better equipped and last longer. The engine can go one million miles before needing a major overhaul, he says.

Advent of negotiation

Selling, however, has changed. "It used to be there was no negotiating on price," Patterson says. "We were forced to sell equipment based on its features, advantages and benefits. Today, negotiations are a much bigger part of the transaction. Everyone negotiates."

Patterson, who lives in Homewood, Ill., a suburb of Chicago, has six children, nine grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

He retired, he says, because "it was time to do something else."

That something else is a return to his musical roots. "I'm taking guitar lessons and I've picked up my sax again," he says. "I want to get back into music."

* * *

Dave Millhouser, former regional sales manager in the Northeast for ABC Companies and popular columnist for *Bus & Motorcoach News*, says it became obvious to him when it was time to retire.

"Truth be told, all of a sudden I couldn't take the motel rooms and constant travel," he says. "I still enjoy travel but not living on the road. I had promised myself that it would be fun to sell to my customer's kids, but the first time it was a grandchild, I was out of there. We were getting very close to that."

Millhouser, 61, started driving



Dave Millhouser

buses in 1965 for Young Life, a nondenominational Christian organization, during summers and weekends while attending Western Maryland College. At one time, Young Life owned 23 buses, shuttling high school kids to camps throughout the country.

For five years, Millhouser worked full time for Young Life's bus company, and served a couple of years as a social worker for the organization.

His motorcoach career took twists and turns, working for Hausman Bus Sales, selling parts in the mid-1970s; Eagle International, the former bus manufacturer; MCI, and Setra North America, before joining ABC Companies.

Millhouser led in sales for several years; there are hundreds of motorcoaches on the road that he sold.

"From the time I worked for Eagle, till the day I retired, all I've done is sell buses," he says. "Actually, I also sold ambulances for a bus guy briefly. I've passed up opportunities for management positions because I really liked selling buses."

Bedrock philosophy

Millhouser's philosophy on selling new buses, which ranged in price from less than \$100,000 at the beginning of his career, to more

than \$400,000 now, is basic.

"I always believed really good bus salesmen are more consultants than salesmen," he says. "Your real goal is to help the customer. I spent a substantial part of my career talking people out of buying buses. The more you try to talk them out of buying a certain bus, the more determined they are to buy. Somehow the business looks more romantic than it is."

"I would not sell a customer something he didn't need. I tried to sell him something he needs when he needs it. If you help his business, he'll buy more from you. Treat customers like partners."

Millhouser says it's a tough business (being a coach operator) and the profit margins are thin. "The equipment is expensive, there is a ton of competition, and many operators don't know their costs," he says. "They think they're making money but they're not."

He tells of a trucker who wanted to buy buses. "Buses are better," the guy told Millhouser, "because they load themselves."

Diving in

Buses are, indeed, better. "It's ironic that a 35-foot bus got the same mileage in the 1960s as 45-foot buses do today — about 5-to-6 miles per gallon," he says.

Millhouser recalls the time years ago he was involved in a sale with a man who was an underwater diver. "He talked me into taking him out diving one day, and in the course of the dive, he accidentally, I think, kicked my mask and mouthpiece out while we were in the engine room of a sunken tanker. At that point he felt pretty obligated to go through with the sale."

Being underwater — literally, not figuratively — was not a rarity for Millhouser. "On the side, I was a professional underwater photographer and writer," he says. "I wanted to sell my photographs and the only way was to write an article to package them."

Millhouser and his wife Susan live in Gloucester, Mass., and plan to stay there. "The ocean is very addictive," he says.

In retirement, he wants to do more writing and re-enter the field of underwater photography.

One of the reasons he felt it was time to retire occurred not long ago when he attended an event at the Museum of Bus Transportation in Hershey, Pa.

"One of the staff showed me a GM 4104 in the display that was the one I'd traveled on when I was an athlete in college. Not like it — THE one. Time to retire."

Michelin tackles tire rolling resistance

GREENVILLE, S.C. — Michelin is investing \$6.8 million in research to improve fuel economy by reducing tire rolling resistance.

The project is aimed at developing a new generation of tires, manufacturing processes, materials and improved modeling and simulation tools.

"We believe that the future, not only of the automotive industry but also of transportation and mobility, lies in the imaginations and hands of these researchers searching for ways to improve fuel economy and overall mobility,"

said Jim Micali, president of Michelin North America, which based in Greenville.

While much of the work will be done internally at Michelin's own research facilities, the investment also includes a \$1.9 million contract with Clemson University and its International Center for Automotive Research. The work will begin immediately and is set to be completed in three years.

In October 2007, Michelin announced plans to reduce tire-related energy consumption and associated greenhouse gas emis-

sions. Those plans included reducing rolling resistance, the force that must be overcome to move vehicle tires forward, by half.

Tires consume up to 20 percent of the energy needed to operate an automobile, and for commercial vehicles the impact may be even higher, past 30 percent, Michelin said.

"Our brightest minds and most talented engineers are rolling up their sleeves to make a difference in tire performance," said David Stafford, chief operating officer of Michelin Americas Research.

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Greyhound accelerates corporate revamp with major changes

DALLAS — The corporate makeover of Greyhound Lines, underway since the company was purchased late last year by First Group PLC and David Leach became CEO, appeared to move into high gear last month.

Among other things, the com-

pany announced:

- Its intention to absorb three subsidiaries, Carolina Trailways, Vermont Transit and TMN&O (Texas, New Mexico and Oklahoma) bus lines, into Greyhound operations. The merger reportedly is to be completed by month's end.

- A revamping of its organizational structure to create four regional vice president positions.

- The consolidation of its headquarters to downtown Dallas, abandoning offices near the Dallas North Tollway that it has occupied since 1991.

Merging the long-time Carolina Trailways, Vermont Transit and TMN&O subsidiaries into Greyhound will be something of a challenge. Differences in corporate cultures, work rules, union representation and other issues are potential bumps in the road for both man-

agers and employees.

Greyhound spokesman Dustin Clark said the new regional vice presidents will allow the company to put more local focus on safety, customer service, business development and working with regulatory agencies.

The move of Greyhound headquarters will transfer about 250 workers to the Patriot Tower at 350 N. St. Paul St. The company has nine floors, housing up to 700 workers, in the downtown tower. It has had offices there since 1993.

"For logistical purposes, having everybody under the same roof will be more convenient," said Clark. "The employee count will stay the same. We're not eliminating jobs."

ABA adds new board members, honors F. Henry

WASHINGTON — The American Bus Association has added more than a dozen members to its board of directors, and honored a long-time board member.

The new board members are: Darren Berg, CEO of MTR Western in Seattle; Bill Bergstrom, executive vice president and COO of Coach America in Dallas; Dane Cornell, president and CEO of ABC Companies in Winter Garden, Fla.; Dave Leach, president and CEO of Greyhound Lines in Dallas; Rick Manna, sales manager of ZF Industries in Vernon Hills, Ill.; John Meier, general manager and CEO of Badger Coaches in Madison, Wis.; Dale Moser, CEO of Coach USA in Paramus, N.J.; C.W. Newman, vice president of Express Transportation in Orlando; Arthur Keith, senior vice president and general manager of Gaylord Opryland in Nashville; Ross Summers, president and CEO of the Branson/Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce and CVB in Branson, Mo.; Greg Shipley, CEO of Academic Travel Services in Hendersonville, N.C., and Sara Hamlin, vice president of tourism for the Greater Birmingham (Ala.) CVB.

The board members were elected unanimously by a voice vote of ABA members attending the 2008 ABA Marketplace last month in Virginia Beach.

Also at the meeting, Martz Group Chairman and CEO Frank M. Henry received the ABA Lifetime Achievement Award.

"Mr. Henry is truly an industry visionary," said ABA Chairman Doug Anderson.

Henry has led the expansion of the Martz Group to include six motorcoach companies.



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People

The **Tennessee Motorcoach Association** has recognized *Glen Collins*, new and pre-owned coach sales representative for **Motor Coach Industries**, with its Service Associate of the Year Award. Collins received the honor because of his participation in association events and relationship with member operators. The award was presented at the association's annual convention and marketplace.

Collins, who has been with MCI for three years, is responsible for coach sales in Tennessee, Kentucky, Alabama, and Arkansas.

Daimler Buses North America in Greensboro, N.C., has named *Randy Kolesar* its western regional sales manager for pre-owned motorcoaches and the Dodge Sprinter shuttle bus.

"We are pleased to have Randy join our sales team," said *Tom Chezem*, vice president of new motorcoach sales for Daimler Buses North America. "Randy brings a wealth of experience and professionalism with him."

Kolesar is based in Southern

California with Daimler's coach inventory at **Setra's** service partner, **Complete Coach Works** in Riverside, Calif.

Kolesar comes to Daimler Buses with more than 20 years experience in the bus industry, including formerly being regional vice president at Motor Coach Industries.

His territory includes Washington, Oregon, California, Arizona, New Mexico and Nevada. Contact him at randy.kolesar@dcbusna.com.

Prevost Car of Sainte-Claire, Quebec, has appointed *David Jacoby* its U.S. parts distribution manager. Jacoby's responsibilities also will include managing projects that further develop Prevost's parts network.

Daimler Buses honors top performers

ORLANDO, Fla. — Daimler Buses North America has honored outstanding company employees, presenting them with its Top Performer of the Year Awards.

"Daimler Buses North America enjoyed a very successful 2007 and this was a direct result of the excellent work performed by all of our staff, including our sales, service and parts staff," said Patrick Scully, chief commercial officer for Daimler Buses North America.



Glen Collins



Randy Kolesar



David Jacoby



Louis Quaglia

ects that further develop Prevost's parts network.

"David has acquired a solid experience at the parts and service level and has shown excellent leadership in all areas," said *Yves Béchard*, Prevost director of distribution operations.

This year's awardees included:

- Setra/Sprinter Sales: Terry Barnett and Rob Lambert (co-winners)
- Setra Support: Jack Farrell
- Parts Sales: Brad Schaeffer

Barnett is Setra regional sales manager for Canada; Lambert is Setra pre-owned regional sales manager in Orlando; Farrell is general manager of the Daimler Buses Service Center of Metro Orlando, and Schaeffer is parts sales manager based in Oriskany, N.Y.

Cornell family book available to buy online

FARIBAULT, Minn. — The new book published by ABC Companies that tells the business story of the company's founders, the Cornell family, can now be ordered on the ABC Website.

Called *From Small Business to Industry Leader — The Cornell Family Business Story*, the book is a collection of memoirs and anecdotes, giving readers a look into the Cornell family and its impact on the bus industry.

It includes vintage photographs and interviews with industry friends, family and ABC staff. It is dedicated to the memory of ABC's late chairman, Ron Cornell.

The book can be ordered at www.abc-companies.com. The price is \$25, plus applicable taxes, shipping and handling. Proceeds from book sales, over and above production and other costs, are being donated to the Clarence Cornell School of Business in the Bus and Motorcoach Academy.



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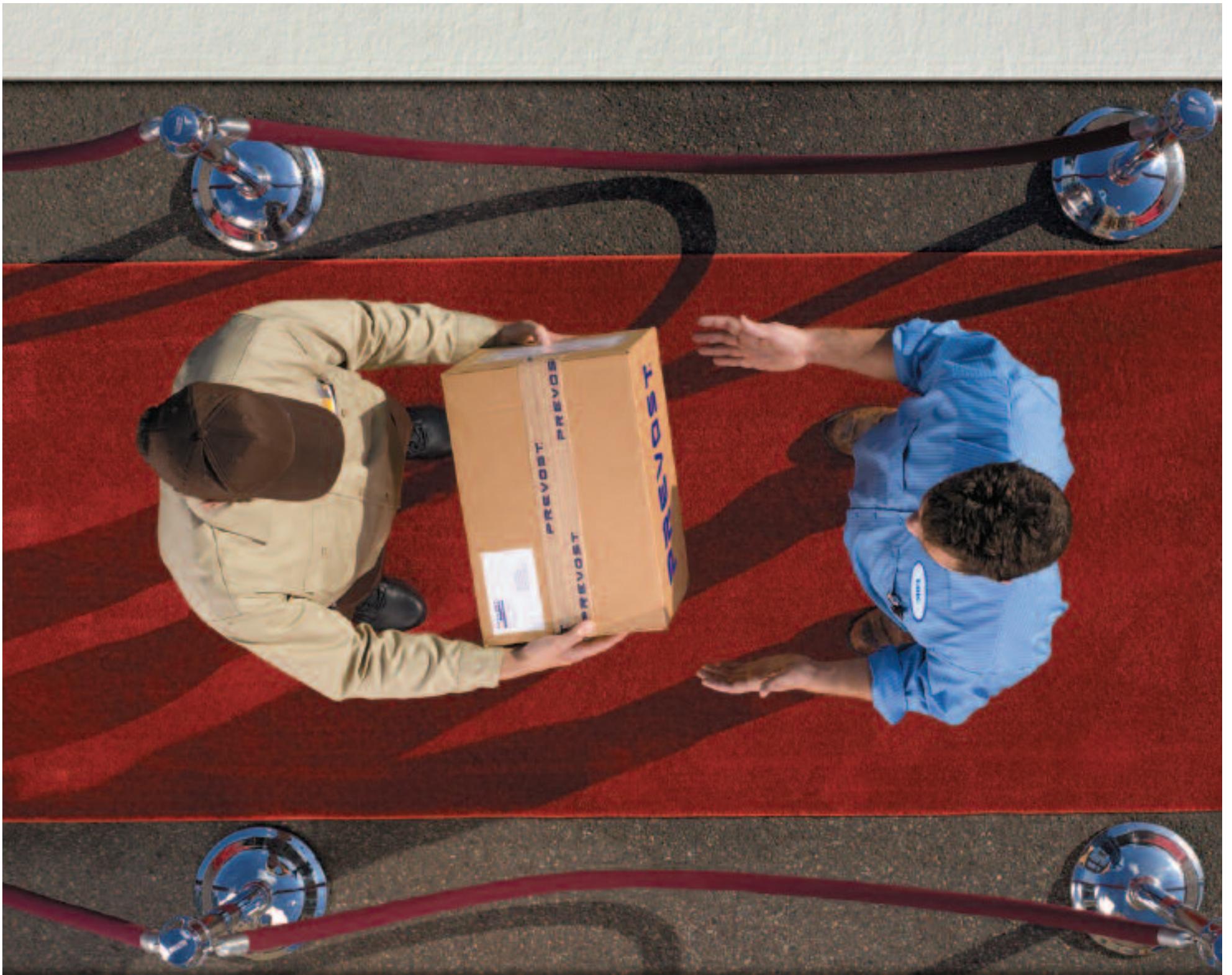


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