

Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE BUS INDUSTRY

\$7 million is up for grabs Money is to be awarded for wheelchair-lift grants

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Transportation and the Federal Transit Administration have announced that more than \$6.89 million will be available this year to help private motorcoach operators pay for the installation of wheelchair lifts on new and used coaches.

The amount for the fiscal 2005 *Over-the-Road Bus Accessibility Program* is similar the total awarded in each of the past five years. In fiscal 2004, for example, 74 motorcoach companies in 26 states received federal grants totaling nearly \$6.91 million. (See Dec. 1 issue of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.) In fiscal 2003, grants totaling

\$6.87 million were awarded to 74 operators.

A year ago, a total of 96 operators applied for the '04 grants, meaning 22 companies that sought money got none. Instead, they received a letter explaining how funding decisions are made. The FTA says it bases its selections on applicants' responsiveness to "statutory project selection criteria" (which are spelled out in the announcement for the grants), fleet size and level of funding received in previous years.

For fiscal '05, \$5.2 million will be available for intercity, fixed-route companies, and nearly \$1.69

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As fuel prices climb operators search for surcharge perfection

As the motorcoach industry rebound continues to gather steam, carriers from coast-to-coast are finding new business and enjoying new revenues. But some of those gains are rapidly being eaten away by huge increases in diesel fuel prices.

Diesel nationally averages more than \$2.30 a gallon, that's 65.5 cents a gallon higher than it was a year ago, according to the federal Energy Information Administration, which tracks fuel prices. Regionally, average diesel fuel prices range from \$2.24 cents a gallon in the Lower Atlantic states, to more than \$2.54 on the West Coast. California tops all states with an

average of \$2.58 a gallon.

What's the answer for carriers to this bottom-line threat?

Fuel surcharges.

Operators tell *Bus & Motorcoach News* they are adding 2 to 7 percent to their regular tour and charter rates and their long-term contracts when they come up for renewal.

Some companies are even including language in new contracts that allow them to increase their rates further if diesel prices reach a certain level.

And a number of operators that put surcharges in place last year have made those increases a permanent

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Passport requirement to impact motorcoach industry

WASHINGTON — In a move with potentially far-reaching implications for the North America motorcoach industry, the federal government announced earlier this month that U.S. citizens will be required to show a passport to re-enter the country from Canada, Mexico and other nearby destinations by 2008.

Some industry executives say the requirement, and its attendant costs, could discourage many of the approximately 80 percent of Americans who don't have passports from traveling outside the U.S.

Additionally, there is fear that unless the lead time needed to get a passport — currently, about six to eight weeks — is reduced, spur-of-the-moment travelers may shun cross-border trips to Canada and Mexico.

Cost also is expected to be an issue, especially for budget-conscious travelers. Passports cost \$97 for adults and \$82 for children under 16.

The change, which is to be phased in during the next three

U.S., Canada coach traffic grows

The number of U.S. residents crossing the border to tour Canada is growing, as is the number of Canadian tourists heading into the U.S. But the upswing still lags behind levels carriers enjoyed in the past.

"It really came back a lot last year, but it's not at the level where it was five years ago and certainly not at the level it was before 2001," reports Brian Crow, president of the Ontario Motor Coach Associa-

tion in Toronto. Years, is part of the ongoing effort to tighten border security after the 2001 terrorist attacks. Canadians, who are the only foreigners allowed to enter the U.S. with only driver's licenses, also will need passports to head south across the border.

tion in Toronto.

Tours between the two countries were running strong before the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorists attacks that rocked the tourism industry and devastated foreign travel.

While there was a general pick-up in tourism and motorcoach travel between the two countries last year, Crow says special factors also played a role in the increase. For example, the drop in

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice told a wire service that the United States has to take every precaution to screen out "people who want to come to hurt us."

Currently, agents at the Canadian and Mexican borders must

examine driver licenses from 50 states and try to determine if they are real or fake. With passports as the main form of identification, "it's going to take a lot of the mystery out" of the process, said a State Department spokeswoman.

Only one in five Americans has a passport, according to the State Department. Because no one knows how many cross U.S. borders without passports, officials don't know how many more people will need them. Nearly 1 million people enter the U.S. from Canada and Mexico every day by bus, car, truck, train or on foot.

The State Department is hiring 500 more workers to process applications, a nearly 50 percent increase. It expects to handle about 2 million more applications annually.

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Warning flags fly after New York-New Jersey thefts

NEWARK, N.J. — Three bus thefts within five days of each other in the New York-New Jersey area has operators on alert.

A 2003 MCI E4500 coach was stolen off the streets of New York City on April 3; a 1998 MCI DL3 was taken a few days earlier from a hotel parking lot in Lyndhurst, N.J., and a Greyhound coach was taken from the Port Authority Bus Terminal. There was a bizarre connection between the Lyndhurst and Port Authority thefts.

The E4500 was broken into, hot wired and driven away during

the early morning hours from where it was parked with other coaches in a permitted area. The coach belongs to Stratton Charter of Cuba City, Wis., a small community in southeast Wisconsin about a dozen miles from Dubuque, Iowa.

The coach was transporting a choral group from Orfordville, Wis., to New York for a FAME Show competition.

The bus was found four days later in Newark, N.J., by police. It had at least two side windows broken, the door was damaged, and

the right side of the body was dented and scratched. Worse, all of the coach's A/V and electronic equipment had been stolen — six video monitors, DVD player, cordless microphone and other gear. "The thieves obviously knew what they were doing and what they were after," said one industry executive familiar with the theft. The miscreants had hot wired the coach to start and drive it.

The vehicle was eventually taken to the MCI Fleet Support Center in Blackwood, N.J.

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Inspection of operator involved in fatal crash finds minor violations

ROCHESTER, N.Y. — A Rochester newspaper reports that an inspection by U.S. officials of a Canadian coach operator involved in a crash that killed four people near here in January, found only minor violations, none of which were serious enough to warrant enforcement action.

Under the federal Freedom of Information Act, the Rochester *Democrat & Chronicle* obtained the results of the investigation conducted by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration of Erie Coach Lines of London, Ont.

On Jan. 29, an Erie coach slammed into the rear of a tractor-trailer parked alongside Interstate 390 in Geneseo, N.Y. Three passengers on the bus were killed, as was the truck driver. Nineteen other bus passengers were injured. (See Feb. 15 issue of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

The bus was carrying members and supporters of a young women's hockey team who had traveled to Rochester to play a local team. They were on a side trip to a ski area when the crash occurred.

After the accident, authorities said the driver, 24-year-old Ryan Comfort, had begun his work day 16 hours before the accident occurred, and that witnesses reported he appeared fatigued and drove erratically in the moments before the crash.

Four days after the crash, the *Democrat & Chronicle* reported inaccurately that criminal charges had been filed against the driver. The inaccurate report was picked up by wire services and repeated elsewhere, including in *Bus & Motorcoach News*.

District Attorney Thomas Moran of Livingston County, N.Y., has

said that evidence of possible felony charges related to the accident would be presented to a grand jury. He has made no comment beyond that.

A compliance review of Erie Coach Lines was conducted in February by the FMCSA. Following the review, the agency assigned the company an overall safety rating of "satisfactory." Erie is a Coach Canada company.

"Basically what this review showed us is this carrier has effective management controls. The review showed no critical or acute violations that would require immediate corrective action," James Lewis, an FMCSA spokesman, told the newspaper.

Lee Schissler, a spokesman for Erie Coach Lines, said the company cooperated fully with the FMCSA inspection. "They could see the quality of the operation and the facility there. I'm just pleased the report came back as it did," he said.

FMCSA inspectors found 21 minor violations, with nearly all of them related to record-keeping. There were seven instances in which the company failed to keep a record of drivers' annual reviews, and six instances in which driver employment applications were not complete.

Inspectors also found that Erie drivers made six false entries in log books. Some of those entries were related to the Geneseo accident, the report indicated.

Comfort, the driver, was charged Feb. 2 by New York State Police with four misdemeanor counts of making false entries in his log during his trip with the hockey team. He was released on bail and returned to his home in St. Thomas, Ont.

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THE DOCKET

State tort reform efforts are producing results

Efforts to revamp the nation's civil justice system, commonly called tort reform, are making headway in legislatures across the U.S.

In recent weeks, the governors of Missouri and South Carolina have signed tort reform legislation and earlier this year the governor of Georgia signed a medical malpractice bill that also contained general tort reforms.

The tort reform legislation signed by Missouri Gov. Matt Blunt is generally being viewed as a fair-and-balanced solution to that state's growing liability problems.

The statute, House Bill 393, does the following:

- Limits punitive damages to \$250,000, or three times the net amount of the judgment awarded the plaintiff against the defendant, whichever is greater.
- Lowers the cap on non-economic damages that can be recovered against health-care providers to \$350,000 (not adjusted for inflation), irrespective of the number of defendants.
- Strengthens venue rules for in-state and out-of-state lawsuits

TORT REFORM 2005

	Main Issues	Bills	Status
Arizona	Constitutional change for legislature to enact reforms	SCR 1035	S Judiciary
Arkansas	Reversal of 2003 reforms	SB 937	S passed
Colorado	Primary seat belt law	HB 1138	Passed S/H; S considering H amends
Florida	Joint & several; vicarious liability; venue	H1513/S2566/S 2568	Introduced
Georgia	Joint & several liability; proportionate fault	SB 3	Signed by governor
Illinois	Evidence disallowed to determine non-economic damages	SB 1460	Committee hearing
Missouri	Joint & several liability; punitive damages; venue reform	SB 271/HB 393	Signed by governor
Oklahoma	Joint & several liability; punitive damages; collateral source evidence; seat belt non-usage as evidence; venue	HB 2047	H passed; S to consider its own bill
Oregon	Non-economic damages	HB 2567	Introduced
S. Carolina	Joint & several liability; venue reform	H1008/S345	Signed by governor
Washington	Seat belts non-usage as evidence	SB 586	H committee reported do-pass
West Virginia	Joint & several liability; collateral source evidence	S421/S598	Introduced

for plaintiffs and defendants, both corporate and individual.

- Eliminates joint and several liability, and specifies that the liability of each defendant who is found to be 50 percent or less at fault is subject only to that percentage of the judgment.

- Specifies that interest calculations for pre- and post-judgment claims are to be based on the federal funds rate, plus a specific per-

centage, depending on the case.

In South Carolina, Gov. Mark Sanford signed House Bill 3008, a business tort reform measure that the governor says will substantially upgrade the state civil justice system, making South Carolina more competitive.

Home to the 11th worst civil justice system in the U.S., South Carolina has seen jobs and investment go elsewhere as a result of its

unfriendly tort system.

Sanford said it was especially critically to get tort reform adopted this year because Georgia and other states have upgraded their laws over the past 20 months.

Meanwhile, Georgia's Republican governor, Sonny Perdue, signed Senate Bill 3 into law. Although the measure is primarily a medical malpractice bill, it also eliminates joint and several liability in all tort cases;

encourages out-of-court settlements by requiring one party to pay the other side's attorney's fees if presented with a reasonable settlement offer, but rejects it, and allows juries to determine if a lawsuit is frivolous.

During the past three years, roughly 100 reforms have passed legislatures around the country, including comprehensive reform packages enacted last year in Mississippi and Ohio.

Chicago continues to hang up on proposed cell-phone ban

CHICAGO — After at least six years of trying, Chicago city aldermen have once again failed to enact a ban on hand-held cell phone use while driving.

Earlier this month, a city council committee overwhelming approved the proposed ban and moved the proposal along to the full council. Forty-two of the 50-member council signed on as co-sponsors.

But, as has happened in the past, there was last-minute wrangling over the merits of the proposal, resulting in another delay. It could be reconsidered next month but in the past delays have oft-times resulted in erosion of support.

Those opposing the proposal offered up a variety of reasons for shunning the idea. One alderman from a ward on the city's edge said his border ward would become "a zone where coppers sit and give tickets" as residents run errands between their homes and nearby suburbs.

Another alderman said that any cell phone ban should be statewide.

A third alderman said the ban was "well intentioned, but another example of overregulation by a

municipality."

Finally, another alderman introduced a measure that would forbid not only the use of hand-held phones in vehicles but a host of other activities as well, including "performing personal grooming," reading and eating.

Only one other city, Washington, D.C., prohibits talking on a hand-held cell phone while driving. New York and New Jersey have statewide bans on the practice.

At the same council meeting, other items of interest to the motorcoach industry were on the agenda. For example, the council cleared the way for the expansion of Wrigley Field.

The council's action ended four years of controversy and debate. By a 47-0 vote, the council approved a plan calling for the Cubs to pay the city \$3.1 million for land that will permit the team to build a 1,790-seat bleachers expansion—down from more than 2,000 in early proposals that encountered heavy community opposition — and develop a five-story commercial building adjacent to the ballpark.

Pee bomb bill to become law in Colorado

DENVER — Thanks to the state General Assembly, there's soon going to be one less thing to worry about while toting a bus load of passengers through Colorado.

The legislators have passed a bipartisan bill that increases fines for hurling containers of human waste out of vehicle windows.

Senate Bill 9 amends existing law by increasing fines for improperly disposing of human waste, including diapers, on highways. The current fine is \$37.20, but increases to \$500 under the bill. The law is expected to generate less than \$5,000 in annual fines, which will go to the state Highway Users Tax Fund.

Dubbed the "pee bomb bill" by some legislators and media, SB-9 passed 55-9 in the House last month after the Senate approved it on its third reading.

The bill was introduced by Democratic Sen. Jim Isgar, the assistant majority leader.

Proposed N.Y. toll hikes have operators in uproar

ALBANY, N.Y. — New York motorcoach operators are up in arms over a proposed 35 percent increase in tolls on the New York State Thruway.

In a letter to the thruway authority, Stanley Brettschneider, president of the Bus Association of New York State, said the toll increase, if enacted, would "drive a number of small charter companies out of business and badly damage the state's tourism industry."

New York operators are urging all carriers who bring coaches into New York to write to the N.Y. State Thruway Authority to protest the increase. Unless there are objections, the agency may just rubber stamp the increase. For information go to www.thruway.state.ny.us.

Under the proposal, the toll for a three-axle coach traveling the 95 miles from the Connecticut state line to New York City would jump to \$22.70, from \$16.70. The proposed toll increases on nation's longest toll system would be the first in 17 years.

"The skyrocketing increase in the cost of fuel on top of major

increases in the cost of liability insurance have destroyed our profit margins and left many of our businesses in a weak condition," Brettschneider wrote to thruway authority chairman John L. Buono.

The Bus Association of New York State, known as BANY, represents 43 New York operators that carry upwards of one million passengers annually. Everywhere they go in New York they are hit with tolls — on roads, bridges and tunnels.

"Some people who are not familiar with our industry suggest that any increase in tolls will just be passed on to the customer. That is totally incorrect," Brettschneider said in his letter. "Because of unfair and cutthroat out-of-state competition, we cannot afford to pass these costs on to the passenger. The net result of your proposal is that our members will be driven closer to bankruptcy."

Under the plan, tolls on the 641-mile system would rise 25 percent for autos. The increases for both commercial vehicles and cars would be smaller when E-ZPass is used.

Fixing operations manual can reduce lawsuit risk

By Paul Berne
Vice President-Claims
Lancer Insurance Company

The risks and threats associated with motorcoach crashes — and the claims and lawsuits resulting from accidents — are growing increasingly worse.

One of the primary sources of material used by plaintiff attorneys who sue motorcoach companies is the wording in their operations manuals relating to “absolute standards.” This material can be extremely damaging in trying to defend claims against an operator.

Bus companies are repeatedly and unfairly punished or criticized for things they mandate as “must be done all the time.” If they are not done and an accident or claim results, the affected company’s operations manual is introduced into evidence and cases can get a lot worse ... and very quickly.

Word Games

A typical trouble spot is the language in the operations manual

regarding driver positioning when passengers are exiting the vehicle. If the manual states: “Drivers must position themselves at the bottom of the steps at all times when passengers are exiting the bus . . .”, and the driver is not there when someone falls, the company’s insurer has a much tougher case to defend because its policyholder did not follow its own absolute standard.

The bus company now has some explaining to do:

- Why it wrote that requirement in the first place
- What type of training it provided to assure its drivers understood the requirement
- How drivers were managed to make sure they were constantly reminded to do this
- How compliance was monitored, and
- Did the company know or should have known the driver involved in the incident was at risk of not complying?

It doesn’t matter that the cause of the fall may have had nothing to do with the driver not being posi-

“Write company standards in such a way they can never be interpreted as absolute”



Paul Berne

tioned at the bottom of the steps. A plaintiff will work hard to convince the jury that, had the driver been there, the fall could have been avoided or the injury would have been much less severe.

A so-called “bus expert” will be hired to support that argument.

And, too often, juries will believe it.

The plaintiff will then put the motorcoach company on trial, asserting that it didn’t provide adequate training on, or enforcement of, its own standard. Thus, the company doesn’t care about safety; the

jury gets mad; the money awarded to the victim goes up.

That being said, a well-intentioned but very frustrated bus company owner might begin to believe that a written operations manual is a “damned-if-you-do, damned-if-you-don’t” proposition because he or she has to set down certain absolute standards but, on the other hand, not create an impossible standard of care.

This conundrum creates a huge operational challenge. For instance, if the company establishes an absolute standard, it has to make

sure it thoroughly and constantly trains and monitors its employees responsible for adhering to it, and disciplines them when the standard is not met.

The company also must anticipate exceptions because, in life, there are few “absolutes.”

What’s an Operator to Do?

Examples of “wrong-and-right” language might help. And, while there are a lot of standards and a lot of different operating parameters, here’s one specific recommendation that should provide guidance:

Write company standards in such a way that they can never be interpreted as “absolute.” Also, add “kicker” language. That is, create exceptions to the standard when passenger safety, the safety of the vehicle or passengers’ personal property may be at risk.

For example, with the driver position issue, if the bottom-of-the-steps rule is established, rather than writing “Drivers must always

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Operators manual

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

position themselves at the bottom of the steps when passengers are exiting the bus . . .” write: “On most trips, drivers should position themselves at the bottom of the steps when passengers are exiting the bus. Some situations may arise in which drivers determine that there is a risk of injury or damage to passengers, passengers’ personal property or to the vehicle itself that requires his or her presence at another position. When that situation arises, drivers must use their best judgment on where to position themselves. Also, on certain trips, such as convention pick-ups, our instruction to drivers is to remain seated when they reach a stop. On these trips, and others in which the driver has been instructed to not position themselves at the bottom of the steps, there is no requirement for drivers to do so.”

How This Helps

Rephrasing the rule like this eliminates the “must always” language, which creates an absolute standard. It says “most trips.” It also

says that it is okay for drivers to not be at the bottom of the steps if there is a good reason (e.g. risk of passenger injury) to not be there.

When reading it to a jury, a company manager can explain that, while it is preferred that drivers position themselves at the bottom of the steps, in certain situations the driver does not have to be there.

But, here is the catch: Continuing testimony must be that new drivers are trained on this; it is discussed from time to time in driver meetings, and a reasonable effort has been made to monitor compliance.

Explaining that drivers are trained to identify passengers in need of help and to ask passengers if they need assistance when exiting would further help the defense.

The reality is that this “catch” applies to anything and everything written in your operations manual, whether it is an absolute standard or a general guideline. Is this language bulletproof? No. But it is a lot better than an unexplained stand-alone absolute standard.

If the broader standard is used in the company’s operations manual and the company driver does not

have a good reason for positioning himself or herself at the bottom of the steps when a passenger falls, the conduct will still be tough to explain.

The Right Focus

This holds true especially if the driver is performing some other function that cannot be explained as reducing risk of injury to others. What this language will do, however, is a better job of keeping the focus on what caused the fall, rather than the content of the company’s operations manual.

Any company which has other “absolute” standards, should add the kicker language where and when possible. The recommended: “Some situations may arise in which drivers determine that there is a risk of injury to passengers that requires his or her presence at another position...” can easily be modified for other situations.

The key here is to emphasize safety and reduce risk to passengers or others as the basis for the exception. Most defense lawyers recommend using wording like: “An effort should be made to...” or “It is advisable when possible...”

whenever a standard could be the subject of intense litigation if it is not followed. Contact your insurance company and ask its help in crafting the language.

Lawyers should be involved when the situation could involve a volatile jury issue. Insurers generally have the best and most experienced lawyers available to assist with this project.

Ultimately, it is up to each motorcoach company owner to make a determination of what works best for his or her operation. These suggestions are just that, “suggestions,” which will help provide service to customers in a better fashion and allow drivers to exercise the good judgment formed by training and their experience to avoid the unfair traps set by wily plaintiffs.

The recommendations presented here are not intended to be legal advice; companies should always refer to local attorneys who are familiar with liability issues and personal injury litigation in those states in which they operate or do business.

Laws and rules applicable to the lawsuits filed against a company

and its liability vary from state to state.

Loss Prevention is Key

Managing bus and motorcoach claims is a very tough business.

It’s not easy to predict when bad things are going to happen, nor guess what crazy and irresponsible contentions are going to be included in lawsuits against affected companies.

Management’s job requires it to develop strategies to prevent accidents from happening in the first place. The job of claims adjusters is to fairly evaluate and, if warranted, reduce or eliminate its policyholder’s exposure.

It is critical, however, that claims professionals constantly inform their company’s policyholders of what it is they’re seeing on the back-end (i.e., reported claims and jury verdicts) that can be controlled at the front end, even if only slightly.

The trucking industry has had a plaintiff bar attacking its members’ operations manuals for many years, but this strategy is still relatively new to the bus and motorcoach industry. It needs to get out ahead of it ... and quickly.

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A new plague

As if motorcoach operators didn't have enough to worry about, two more have surfaced thanks to a few litigious slimeballs and zealous government attorneys.

The Associated Press reports that businesses across the country are being hit with a rash of what have come to be called "drive-by" ADA lawsuits. The suits are little more than shakedown attempts by lawyers and their clients hoping for quick cash settlements.

The basis for the suits is the Americans with Disabilities Act that dictates requirements aimed at improving the mobility of disabled individuals. Motorcoach operators know the law well because it requires them to have wheelchair accessible coaches.

But some judges are suggesting that a large number of ADA lawsuits are frivolous actions filed by a small number of disabled people and their lawyers.

A federal judge in Orlando, noted in a ruling last year that Jorge Luis Rodriguez, a paraplegic, had filed more than 200 ADA lawsuits within a few years, most of them using the same attorney. "The current ADA lawsuit binge is, therefore, essentially driven by economics — that is, the economics of attorney's fees," the judge wrote. He said Rodriguez's testimony left the impression that he is a "professional pawn in a scheme to bilk attorney's fees" from those being sued.

In December, a federal judge in Los Angeles said a man — who had filed hundreds of lawsuits that accused businesses of violating the ADA — was running an extortion scam. The judge barred the plaintiff, Jarek Molski, from bringing any more suits without court permission.

Molski, who has used a wheelchair since he was paralyzed in a motorcycle accident a decade ago,

has filed 400 suits in the past seven years against restaurants, wineries, bowling alleys, banks and other businesses. In most cases, the judge said, Molski demands \$4,000 a day until the target of his suit is brought into compliance with ADA, then agrees to a cash settlement.

Some disabled individuals say such lawsuits are needed. They contend that complaining to the Justice Department produces no results.

In Oklahoma, the lawsuit phenomenon has led the Oklahoma Restaurant Association to post a warning on its Web site about attorneys hiring disabled people to seek out ADA violations.

Another threat comes in the form of attorneys from the U.S. Justice and Labor departments. These guys are stepping up the pace of criminal prosecutions for OSHA violations. That's right, they're pressing criminal charges when they find serious workplace safety and health violations.

One attorney from the Justice Department criminal division told a conference last month in Las Vegas that regional government officials have new instructions to contact the Justice Department to discuss the possibility of criminal prosecution when OSHA believes that a fatality has resulted from a willful violation of an OSHA standard.

The attorney also said there is an increased emphasis on utilizing obstruction of justice laws, which can result in felony convictions, when company executives unlawfully modify or destroy documents that should have been maintained. If employees, supervisors or others engage in these acts, "the Justice Department is going to take that case," and they will be prosecuted, the attorney said.

This is a no-brainer: Don't give the sue birds any reason to target your company.

Former Congressional staffer blasts FTA over rules issues

WASHINGTON — The former staff director of a committee of the U.S. House of Representatives has sent a blistering letter to the administrator of the Federal Transit Administration, accusing the agency of being unresponsive to Congress, shunning federal law and providing half-baked solutions for agency shortcomings.

Barbara Kahlow, former director of the House Government Reform Subcommittee on Energy Policy, Natural Resources and Regulatory Affairs, said in a letter to FTA Administrator Jennifer Dorn that Dorn's agency has failed to address "several problems" uncovered by the subcommittee during the past two years.

Kahlow left the federal government early this year when the chairman of the subcommittee, U.S. Rep. Doug Ose, R-Calif., decided not to run for re-election.

In her "Dear Administrator Dorn" letter, Kahlow specifically took the FTA to task for its response to repeated requests by Congressman Ose that the FTA issue rules implementing the statutes and regulations governing

private-sector participation in mass transit.

Such rules, Ose and Kahlow contend, would end confusion and noncompliance by public transit agencies with federal charter service regulations and other laws and rules related to private-sector participation in mass transportation.

Instead of publishing such rules, the FTA issued a "nonregulatory guidance document" entitled *Federal Transit Administration — Private Enterprise Participation in Transportation Planning and Service Delivery*.

Kahlow says the document needs to be trashed or completely revamped.

"I am disappointed that the draft does not clearly address the several problems uncovered by the subcommittee," she wrote. "In fact, the FTA draft includes no mention of the obligation for all public (transit agencies) to systematically conduct outreach to all existing local private-sector operators. Instead, the draft places the burden on the private sector to 'get more involved,' 'convey their interest,' etc." In Kahlow's view,

this is unacceptable.

In addition, Kahlow says the FTA draft omits any mention of several key statutory and regulatory provisions designed to protect the private sector. For example, there's no mention of the provisions in the FTA Grants Management Common Rule that says transit agencies or their subcontractors cannot use equipment acquired with federal money to provide services for a fee to compete unfairly with private companies that provide equivalent services, unless specifically permitted by federal law.

Kahlow says that enforcement of that rule and other provisions by the U.S. Department of Transportation and the FTA "is critical for successful participation by the private sector.

"The bottom line is that the draft (document) needs total revision to specifically address each of the problems uncovered by the House Government Reform Subcommittee, and to clarify all grantee obligations and DOT's expected enforcement approach henceforth," Kahlow concluded.

Industry supports Mt. Vernon clean-up

MOUNT VERNON — Hundreds of travel and tourism professionals, including the motorcoach executives, are expected to show up next month for a fix-up and clean-up event at George Washington's Mount Vernon Estate and Gardens.

Tourism Cares for Tomorrow, a nonprofit organization that works to preserve historical and cultural attractions, said Mount Vernon will be the site of its third annual Tourism-Caring for America restor-

ation and clean-up activity. The date will be May 13.

Hundreds of travel and tourism executives are expected to assist Mount Vernon's horticulture staff in clearing nearly 300 acres of forest, which was damaged two years ago during Hurricane Isabel.

Diminishing the risk of fires that could threaten the estate, providing improved shelter for animals, upgrading the appearance of the Potomac River shoreline, and

creating an opportunity for the forest to regenerate are the goals of the conservation event.

Among the sponsors are New World Tours, Coach Quote.com, Tauck World Discovery, Globus & Cosmos, American Bus Association, National Tour Association and United States Tour Operators Association.

For more information, go to www.tourismcaresfortomorrow.org, or call (781) 821-5990.

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ISSUE NO. 52

People

M. Wayne Phillips has been elected chairman of **Colonial Trailways Charters & Tours** in Mobile, Ala. Phillips moves to chairman from president. Named president was *Frank E. Montgomery III*, who moves up from vice president and general manager. In other promotions, Colonial's Safety Director *Curtis Wiggins* was named vice president and general manager, while Joe Marshall was named *operations supervisor*.

ABC Companies announced its top sales performers for last year. *Clint Guth*, account executive for ABC's western region, was named salesperson of the year for the second consecutive year. Also recognized for outstanding performance in 2004 was *Claude Payne*, sales manager of the southeastern region, and *Bob Holloway*, senior account executive in the southern region. They received second- and third-place awards respectively. "We recognize these individuals for their commitment to their customers and to ABC Companies, as well as their achievement in sales," said ABC President and CEO *Ron Cornell*. "They are dedicated to this industry and are passionate about the success



Clint Guth

Bob Holloway

of their customers."

Blue Bird Corp. of Fort Valley, Ga., has appointed *Fred VanDenBerg* director of sales and marketing for the motorhome division. Most recently, VanDenBerg was sales business manager at Veurinks RV Center. He previously was COO at Buddy Gregg Motor Homes, and executive vice president-general manager at Newell Coach Corp.

Chris Patterson is replacing *Rainer Schmueckle* as chief executive of **Freightliner**, the largest maker of class 8 over-the-road trucks and producer of chassis used for larger cutaway buses, including the ABC M1000 series coaches. Patterson succeeds Rainer Schmueckle, who becomes COO of the Mercedes Car Group on April 15. Patterson, 50, will report to *Andreas Renschler*, head of DaimlerChrysler's commercial vehicles division. Patterson spent 14 years at Canadian Kenworth. In 1996, he was named senior vice president of sales

National Interstate profits rise

RICHFIELD, Ohio — National Interstate Corp., parent company National Interstate Insurance, has cut its long-term debt nearly in half and reported a double-digit increase in earnings for last year.

The coach industry's No. 2 insurer said it earned \$22.8 million, or \$1.47 per share, last year, up nearly 15 percent from 2003 earnings of \$19.8 million, or \$1.29 a share.

The income gain largely reflects higher profits from operations and investments. Losses, loss adjustment expenses and interest expenses rose sharply during the year, slowing the profit gains.

The increase in losses and loss

adjustment expense ratio reflected the impact of four hurricanes last year and fewer losses in 2003.

Gross premiums written last year totaled \$225 million, up 20 percent from 2003, reflecting both volume growth and rate increases. National Interstate said that expansion of existing transportation product lines, growth in alternative risk-transfer products and expanded distribution in specialty personal lines contributed to the volume increase.

Premiums earned jumped 24.2 percent to \$156.9 million last year.

"We are very pleased with our overall results and the 37.2 percent return on equity we achieved in

2004," said Alan Spachman, chairman and president of National Interstate. "We continued to execute our growth strategy while maintaining a disciplined underwriting practice and intense focus on profitability. Our recent IPO enabled us to reduce debt and provides capital to fund future growth opportunities."

National Interstate reduced its debt by paying off a \$15 million loan from its largest shareholder, Great American Insurance Co. The payoff reduces company debt from roughly \$33 million to \$18 million.

National Interstate went public at the end of January and trades on Nasdaq under the symbol NATL.

and marketing of Freightliner in Portland, Ore. He left Freightliner the next year to become executive vice president of sales and marketing at Volvo Trucks North America, rejoining Freightliner in 2002, where he has been senior vice president of service for the past three years.

President *George Bush* intends to re-nominate *Ellen Engleman Conners* to a second term as chairwoman of the **National Transpor-**

tation Safety Board. The NTSB investigates transportation-related accidents and makes safety recommendations. Conners must be reconfirmed by the U.S. Senate. Bush also plans to re-nominate *Mark Rosenker* as vice chairman.

President Bush also announced his intention to nominate *Maria Cino*, a career political operative, to be deputy secretary of the **Department of Transportation.** Cino will fill a position that has been vacant

since December 2003, when *Michael P. Jackson* left. Jackson resurfaced in Washington earlier this month as deputy secretary of the Department of Homeland Security. Cino currently serves as deputy chairwoman of the Republican National Committee, but has government experience in the Commerce Department and commercial service. One supporter praised her management experience and reputation for integrity.

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Passport

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

The new system will begin at the end of this year in the Caribbean and Bermuda, then Mexico and Canada. It will be put in place at airports and seaports first, then spread to land crossings, meaning the coach industry will be among the last impacted.

Some U.S. citizens, Canadians and Mexicans will be able to cross the border using other government travel documents that require a background check. But most will need passports, instead of a driver's license or other photo ID now

used by many to re-enter the United States.

Brian Crowe, president of the Ontario Motor Coach Association, thinks the rule change could be positive for some coach operators but hurt others.

He's most concerned about operators who shuttle Americans back and forth across the border for quick trips, such as those going to Ontario casinos, or for a theater weekend in Toronto.

Operators fear those Americans may not be inclined to get a passport so they can continue making such trips.

"I don't see Americans getting

passports for day trips," he said.

At the same time, Crow thinks there are lots of 50- and 60-year-old experienced travelers, both American and Canadian, who already have passports or don't see getting one as a big deal.

Many of these travelers have learned that a passport is by far the best identification for getting across borders and through security checks, regardless the country.

Crow also believes that security agencies will be working during the next three years to improve border procedures and security checks to speed the process.

Wheelchair lift

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

million for other over-the-road coach operators.

The competition

The wheelchair lift grants are awarded on a competitive basis. To apply, operators must submit a completed application to the FTA regional office that covers the state where the applicant is based. There are 10 regional FTA offices and their locations are listed in the announcement of the grants that was published in the Federal Register on April 7. The deadline to apply is June 6.

The 21-page announcement can also be found on the Internet at the FTA Web site: www.fta.dot.gov.

Additionally, a synopsis of the announcement is to be posted in the FIND module of the government-wide electronic grants Web site at <http://www.grants.gov>.

Applications may be submitted to FTA in hard copy or electronically through the GRANTS.GOV APPLY function. Those who intend to apply electronically should regis-

ter on the GRANTS.GOV site soon to assure completion of registration before the deadline.

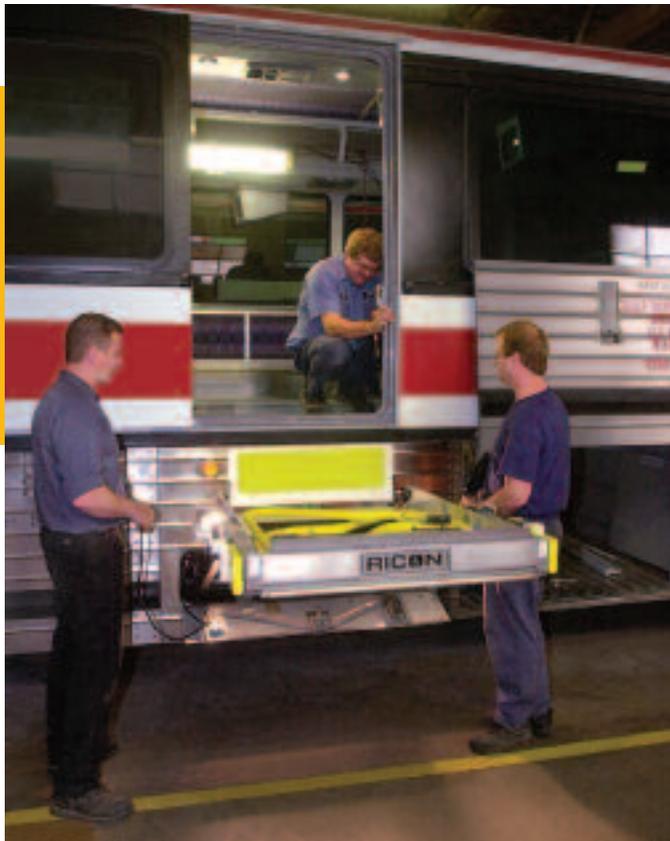
The notices about the program spell out the application process, which is no cakewalk. Grants under the program generally range from \$20,000 to \$291,000; no one receives as much as they apply for. Greyhound typically ends up getting about 40 percent of the money from the program.

Got questions?

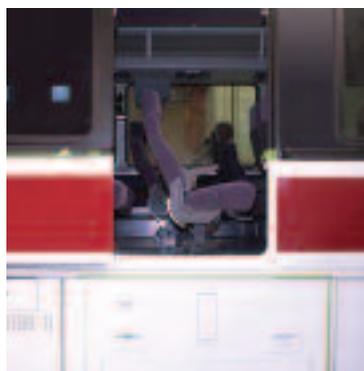
If you have questions, contact the FTA regional administrator in your area for application-specific information. For general program information, contact Blenda Younger, Office of Program Management, at (202) 366-2053, or e-mail: blenda.younger@fta.dot.gov.

The announcement for this year's program comes as another major deadline for wheelchair-accessible buses approaches. Fixed-route carriers having annual operating revenue of \$5.3 million or more must have half of their fleet wheelchair accessible by next year. By 2012, 100 percent of their vehicles must be accessible.

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Border crossings

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

talk of streamlining the process of crossing the U.S.-Canadian frontier, which has been more heavily secured since 9/11, travel in either direction still requires 20 to 30 minutes of wait time, about twice as long as it did three years ago.

"We are aware of the security issues and we are trying to do our best to help (U.S.) Homeland Security," says Crow. "We understand they have to do some security checks that develop delays at the border."

While the delays have not created major problems, Crow warns that other changes and the proposed new U.S. passport requirement could extend border wait times. Another expected change would be a requirement that motorcoach operators will have to maintain passenger manifests.

Additionally, he expects security checks to be expanded as new technology opens up additional ways to screen passengers, including thumb printing and retina scans.

Meantime, Crow said there appear to be none of the border-crossing problems that operators experienced in the past because of conflicting interpretations of the North American Free Trade Agreement. In the late 1990s, a number of Canadian motorcoach drivers were denied access to the U.S. because of the different inter-

pretations.

"If I had 100 problems, this would not be on the top 100 list today," said Crow. "We're just not having any great problems."

Canada has always maintained that NAFTA allows a Canadian tour bus driver to enter the U.S. as a "business visitor," board passengers, take them back to Canada for a tour and then return them to the U.S. The U.S., on the other hand, held that such border crossings were not permitted and were turning away drivers at the border.

However, the U.S. has since adopted the Canadian position, and drivers freely cross into each other's countries to pickup passengers and take them back to their own countries for tours.

Drivers still are not allowed to cross the border, pick up passengers and then take them on tours predominantly within that country. Some drivers have attempted to get around the regulation by driving back to their own country for a brief period. "That's just not permitted," said Crow, who added that a significant portion of the tour must be in the driver's own country for it to be legal.

NAFTA also prohibits a driver from picking up passengers across the border and discharging them at another location in the same country. "Canadian drivers can't do point-to-point in the U.S., and U.S. drivers can't do it in Canada," Crow stressed. "That's pretty clear."

Focus on tires: Tips for improving wear

By Bryan Couch
Motor Coach Industries

For going the distance, nearly all tire suppliers are rolling out new tires that offer added strength and durability.

Still, tire wear remains an issue because tire costs add up over time. Therefore, proper tire care should be high on any maintenance checklist.

Important contributing factors to tire wear include engine power, braking forces, driving style, road conditions, climate, speed, load, and maintenance. Paying special attention to these factors early on, when a coach is first put into operation, contributes to longer tire wear.

A good place to start is with driver training.

Begin by including tire wear tips when training drivers on the operation of the vehicle, engine brake, transmission brake or retarder, automatic braking system, and automatic transaction control.

Since tire manufacturers' rate performance at 75 miles per hour, caution drivers not to exceed that limit because increases in speed will reduce tread life; urge them to slow down, especially in hot weather when air and surface temperatures are extreme. Explain how accelerating and braking should be gradual, and caution them to avoid bumping curbs when turning or parking.

Always refer to tire manufacturer information for proper care. Service advice also can be found on tire manufacturers' Web sites. Here are a few more tips:

Check pressures

Driving on under-inflated tires is dangerous and increases the chances of a blowout. Over-inflated tires are more susceptible to damage from road hazards since too much pressure makes the tire stiffer. Always inflate to pressures recommended in the operator's manual. Or, for proper tire pressures at maximum gross vehicle weight (GVW), refer to the VIN plate for posted tire pressures in single and dual applications. Be sure to measure the pressure when tires are cold (meaning the tire has cooled for at least three to four hours or, ideally, overnight), at least once a week and daily on long road trips.

On axles with dual wheels, maintaining equal tire pressures is essential. A tire with a difference of just 5 pounds will change the circumference of the wheel assembly by 3/16ths to 5/16ths of an inch. That sounds small until you realize that on a wheel that rotates roughly



Bryan Couch

500 turns in a mile, the difference becomes 156 inches, or one full wheel revolution. In simple terms, this means that one of the duals will skid one revolution every mile.

Consider a monitor

Today, more vehicle manufacturers offer tire-pressure monitoring systems as an option. MCI offers the SmarTire system, which provides an early warning if the tire pressure falls below the established setting or when air temperature rises above the established setting.

Check treads

According to the Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance, tire grooves should be as follows: Steer axle, more than 2/32nds-inch in any two adjacent grooves, other axles more than 1/32nds-inch in any two adjacent grooves measured in three places. Look for even wear. Uneven tire wear can indicate a number of problems. Consult your tire manufacturer and vehicle manufacturer for help in diagnosing uneven tire wear.

Alignment, rotation

Proper wheel alignment and tire rotation also are vital for optimal tire life and coach handling. Frequent alignments should be regarded as routine preventative maintenance, even on a new coach. Follow the manufacturer's suggested procedure.

Toe-in and camber should be set close to the minimum settings of the manufacturer requirements. Caster should be set to the maximum positive setting allowed by manufacturer requirements. Request that the technician align the coach to the preferred specifications, not just within the range.

It also is beneficial to obtain a post-alignment printout to confirm the thoroughness of the procedure, as well as to document your coach's settings in the case of an encounter with a suspension-damaging road hazard.

If your coach has a steerable tag axle, follow the manufacturer's recommendation for alignment of coaches with this feature.

These practices should provide longer tire wear and greater riding pleasure.

Bus thefts

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

The Lyndhurst theft was a coach belonging to Virginia Coach Co. of Purcellville, Va., and occurred March 31. It was taken from the parking lot of a Quality Inn in Lyndhurst, which is in northern N.J., less than a dozen miles directly north of Newark. The driver had gone for a walk at 8 p.m. and the coach was in the lot. After a two-hour nap, he got up, looked out the window, and the coach was gone.

The coach is painted white with Virginia Coach livery and the word Virginia in block letters mounted below the windshield. It has a Virginia license plate, No. E35509, a VIN No. 50130,

and bears the vehicle ID No. 9815 on each side in the top corners of the windshield, and above the passenger door and driver side window.

What made the Virginia Coach theft bizarre was that a Greyhound that had been stolen that same evening from the Port Authority terminal was abandoned in the Quality Inn parking lot not far from where the Virginia Coach bus had been parked.

It was as if the miscreants swapped coaches.

Stealing a motorcoach is not difficult — if you know what you are doing — but guarding against it is a chore. Short of camping out in the bus with a shotgun, a determined and knowledgeable thief can break in and hot wire a vehi-

cle. And, say experts, there are few fool-proof gadgets that will deter smart and motivated thieves.

A hidden "kill" switch that disables the electrical system is a fairly common solution but such a switch is not, of course, foolproof. That's because the driver has to use it — or remember to use it, and disgruntled former employees know about it.

Today's sophisticated electronics make theft more difficult but frequently such systems only work after the coach has been taken and is tooling down the road. If a crook is only after the coach's electronic gear, the vehicle may not need to be moved for the theft to take place. Entry through a roof vent left open doesn't even require a break-in.

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Surcharges

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

part of their rates, and inserted additional surcharges this year.

Even the few carriers that have held back, and have yet to do anything, say they are on the verge of acting.

"I think it's coming very, very soon, possibly in the next 30 days," said Dennis Levering, president of Gray Line Tours of Nashville, who plans to add a surcharge when his local fuel price hits \$2.25 a gallon, just a few pennies below what he last paid.

Levering is uncertain how he will calculate the surcharge but says he'll look at either a per-mile charge or a flat percentage.

Many methods

Operators have adopted lots of methods of determining surcharges, although most seem to base them on the percentage that fuel costs take from their revenues or make up of their total operating expenses.

"If the amount your fuel expense takes from your gross revenues goes from 8 percent to 9 percent, and you want to keep the same margin, then you have to raise your prices or have a surcharge of one

percentage point," said Jeff Polzien, president of Red Carpet Charters in Oklahoma City, Okla.

Last year, Red Carpet initiated a 2 percent surcharge, folded that amount into its new rate schedule that began in January, and then added another 2 percent surcharge in February when diesel prices took off again. "Now it looks like we're going to have to raise it to 4 percent because the prices keep going up," said Polzien.

Mike Waters, general manager of Coach USA San Francisco, said his company uses fuel costs as a percentage of total operating expenses to figure its surcharge, and adds a penny to it for every 10-cent increase in the price of fuel. The current surcharge is 7 percent, up from 5 percent earlier this year.

Surcharge table

Carl R. Bieber Tourways of Kutztown, Pa., developed a fuel surcharge table that allows it to adjust its line-haul rates each month based on the federal EIA national average diesel price, explained Boyd Kreglow. The latest surcharge is 6.75 percent.

He said the table, which is similar to ones used by such package delivery giants as FedEx and UPS,

and major trucking companies, increases by one-half percent as the fuel price goes up or down. It is based on the percent that fuel costs reduce gross revenues and is adjusted so the revenue stream remains the same.

"We've once or twice even lowered our prices because fuel costs went down and that pleased our customers because we showed them we were doing just what we said we were going to do," he added.

Rather than impose the surcharge on its tour and charter rates, he said the company opted to increase those rates by 5 percent because of the many bookings it makes months and often a year in advance.

"Our customers needed a fixed price because they are going back to sell the tours," he said.

Dean Brown, assistant manager of Lamers Tour and Travel in Green Bay, Wis., said his company based its 6 percent surcharge on what its fuel costs were over the past 12 months and then came up with a figure that would allow it to recoup part of the cost. "We don't expect our customers to meet all of the increases," he noted.

Gray Line of Seattle used fuel-cost projections to settle on its 5 percent surcharge, although reach-

ing that figure was somewhat complicated, according to David Gudge, general manager. He said the company charges by the mile and by the hour, and had to mix both the local and over-the-road miles into the model. "We wanted to have the same increase for all of our customers," he said.

The company also has developed long-term contracts that contain fuel price triggers that will allow it to increase its charges up to a set percentage if the cost of fuel continues upward.

Projections difficult

Mike Bazelides, executive vice president of Indian Trails in Owosso, Mich., said the company used projections to calculate its 5 percent surcharge, but prices have been so unstable lately that it ended up missing what it was hoping to take in by a wide margin.

"It's certainly not an exact science," he said, adding that the company was looking for prices to peak at 50 to 60 cents below the current price.

Meanwhile, diesel fuel projections remain a difficult guessing game. Bazelides points to recent reports from two analysts, one says crude prices by year's end could

drop to \$45 a barrel, and the other says they could reach \$105. "They're all over the board so you have to go with the one you trust the most," he said.

Most operators say customers are understanding of the situation because they see that gasoline prices have gone crazy. "Most of them just accept it because they're buying gasoline at the pumps, too, and they know what's going on," said Waters.

Any easy sell

Polzien agrees, noting that a fuel surcharge is the easiest increase to sell to customers because of their keen awareness of gasoline prices. "And they don't seem to question the amount of the surcharge, either," he noted.

He suggested, too, that while the high price of diesel might create short-term problems for motorcoach carriers, it could actually benefit the industry in the long run.

"We have a lower percentage of fuel costs for our operations than any other form of transportation, so the higher cost of fuel makes us cheaper relative to cars and airplanes," he said. "Maybe we ought to be embracing them instead of griping."

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The Dan Dippert Way

Operator offers tips to build company revenue

ARLINGTON, Texas — Dan Dippert has spent 34 years in the travel industry, including nearly 25 years as owner of Dan Dippert Coaches, a tour and charter operation in Arlington.

Off and on during the past 15 years, he has been sharing a system he developed for boosting sales. One of his most recent presentations was at Motorcoach Expo 2005 in Las Vegas.

Dippert, who has the soft-spoken — yet self-assured — demeanor of a minister, which he spent 14 years studying to become, not only preaches his recipe for sales success, but underpins his philosophy with ideas for being a better business person and human being.

He cautions, however, that his system shouldn't be interpreted as gospel. "It's how I do it, he says. "It might not be the way you should do it."

Dippert bases his method on a process he picked up at an American Express seminar in the late 1980s. He refined and remolded the Amex system, creating his own, and has been practicing and preaching it ever since.

Before explaining his technique, however, Dippert challenges listeners to think about devoting more of their time to "working on the business," not just "working at the business." He said owners and managers need to think more often about their business and ask questions: "Who are we? Who do we want to be? Where do we want to be?" And, "What is our mission? And where do I want to go?"

Dippert offers answers to those questions as he has defined them over the years for his 19-coach company, which he recently sold to his son and daughter. When he was running things, Dippert wanted his company to have:

- A high level of service
- Respect for customers
- Well-trained employees
- A good pay scale for employees
- A respectable profit margin
- A high profile in the community for civic and charitable responsibility

"All those things work together," says Dippert. "Ask yourself: What are you in business for?"

The Dippert sales process is a step-by-step system that begins with a sincere greeting and creating rapport with customers. Since most sales inquiries come via the telephone, it is vital that the first voice a potential customer hears is friendly and pleasant. "You can hear a

smile over the phone," he says.

So, asking employees to show enthusiasm when answering the phone is critical, as is moving quickly to build an affinity with the caller. He says when employees answer the phone, the name of the company should be given, along with the first name of the person answering. Obtaining the caller's name and number is also a vital part of Step One.

Dippert is such a firm believer in the power of a friendly voice that he mounted mirrors in front of employees and asked them to look at themselves smiling when they picked up the phone. He also recommends against centralized phone systems. The sales staff should take sales calls, mechanics should answer maintenance-related calls and so on, according to Dippert.

Step Two in the Dippert system is qualifying the caller by asking questions. "Who, what, when, where, why and how" questions. "Ask questions because you are interested. Focus on the call and caller. Ask open-ended questions. Ask direct questions when you need to get specific information.

"The one who asks the most questions wins," he tells his audiences.

Questioning and listening to customers will reveal their needs and preferences.

The next step is to recommend and cross sell based on customer desires and requirements.

This phase of the process is accomplished by pointing out features and benefits, using visual imagery, as well as cross selling logical services. Being creative and fleet-footed, and knowing all aspects of your product is essential, Dippert suggests. Even the mundane and commonplace can become a sales asset in Dippert's hands.

For example, when the customer indicates her group will have a leader. Dippert responds by pointing out that his coaches are equipped with a "special" microphone for group leaders.

When the customer indicates the group will be composed of little old ladies in tennis shoes. Dippert tells the caller than his company has "the perfect driver" for little old ladies who wear sneakers.

When the customer is a ball team going to a tournament, Dippert responds by pointing out that his coaches have a VCR for showing game films and last-minute coaching.

Other off-hand customer comments may warrant pointing out that coaches also have arm rests, foot rests, reclining seats, reading lights, overhead storage and individual A/C vents.

Dippert likes to paint a verbal picture. "Sell the picture," he urges.

Tell the customer that "when our coach comes around the corner, all shiny and clean to pick up your group, you're going to be so proud you hired Dan Dippert for your trip."

Dippert also is a big believer in cross selling incidentals — ice, drinks, water, trip cancellation and interruption insurance, baggage protection and tables. "If you're not cross selling," says Dippert, you're leaving tons of money on the ground.

At this point in the Dippert process, you're ready to ask for a commitment. That means asking for a deposit or payment in full, and no accounts receivable. "We take credit cards and full payments. Get your money," he advises. Also address any client concerns at this point and initiate a client callback schedule with a specific date and time.



Dan Dippert advocates cross-selling.

Finally, close the sale. Summarize, or sandwich everything together. Repeat back to the customer that they're "going to get a driver in uniform, insurance, a 55-seat coach with arm rests" and so on.

Asks for leads. "Do you know others who are doing the same thing?"

His final bit of sales advice is to follow up — twice.

First, call or send a note to the client after they return from their trip. Include a comment card. Then, call no more than three months later

to ask about future travel plans.

Other Dippertisms:

- He likes direct mail to advertise his coach business.

- He books business via a company Web site. He likes the idea of walking people through the Web site — www.dandippert.com — while they're on the phone.

- The last 10 years have been tough for small operators. He says he's "not sure I could have made it" without having his son and daughter in the business. He credits them with doing the right things.

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Cardiff Limousine Palm Desert, Calif.

Cardiff Limousine & Transportation, the largest private passenger carrier in one of America's favorite desert playgrounds, Palm Springs, Calif., has expanded its fleet with the addition of two Prevost H3-45 motorcoaches.

Company President Gary Cardiff has been adding Prevosts for years and has been pleased with the acceptance by customers. "They liked the ride, the look, the amenities and the excellent visibility that comes with every Prevost vehicle. They soon began asking for them by name," Cardiff says. "That's when we knew for sure we had

ordered the right motorcoaches."

The new Prevosts help Cardiff meet a growing demand for tour and convention services. The company also provides airport service.

The company's 52-vehicle fleet includes 14 Prevosts, plus midsize buses, limousines, sedans and vans.

The two new Prevosts are equipped with Detroit Diesel Series 60 engines, Jake Brakes, Amaya seats, Alcoa wheels, Michelin tires, REI A/V systems with five monitors and DVD players, Scenic View cameras, and Xenon headlights.

One coach has an Allison B500 and the other has a ZF AS-tronic.



Colorful graphics distinguish Gary Cardiff's coaches.

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Calco Travel Lutcher, La.

Expansion late last year into Baton Rouge, La., prompted Calco Travel to purchase five new Van Hool C2045 coaches. The new Baton Rouge bus yard and office position the company to better serve another Louisiana market, Lafayette, which is just over 50 miles west.

Lafayette lays claim to both Cajun and Creole cultures, and also is noted for its plantations, folklife and Zydeco music.

Calco has been serving the region for 70 years, first as Hotard Bus Line and later as Premier Motorcoach. For the past three years it has been Calco Travel, a name adopted by the owners, Callen and Coleen Hotard.



The Hotards' company offers charter coach services, as well as packaged tours and vacations. With the company base just west of New Orleans in Lutcher, the Big Easy has been the primary market for the company.

The company's new Van Hools are equipped with Cummins ISM

450-horsepower engines, Amaya Brasil seats, Isringhausen driver seats, REI A/V systems with four LCD flat-panel monitors, Jake Brakes, Firestone tires and Alcoa wheels.

Four of the coaches have Allison B500 transmissions and one is equipped with a ZF AS-tronic transmission.

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Blackhawk Express Bloomer, Wis.

Blackhawk Express, a tour and charter operator, has taken delivery of two 2005 MCI E4500s. The new coaches join five other E4500s in the company fleet.

Dave Joswiak, who co-owns the company with his wife, Diane, attributes Blackhawk's success to its ability to serve its market of tour operators without trying to compete directly. He says the E4500s provide a "huge advantage" in a market that has few luxury coaches.

"We find that the E4500 satisfies all types of travelers," he says. "People like the E4500's curb appeal and we believe they should be able to ride in style with all of the amenities these buses have to offer."

Blackhawk puts 900,000 miles on its 10 MCI coaches annually, taking charter groups around the state and throughout the country. The company, which employs 40 people, operates its own maintenance facility and has invested in

MCI training for all the mechanics. The Joswiaks are the second generation to operate the company that was founded in 1981.

Their new E4500s are equipped with Detroit Diesel Series 60 engines, Jake Brakes, ZF AS-Tronic transmissions, REI A/V systems with DVD and VCR players, six LCD monitors, R.C.A. flooring, Michelin tires, Alcoa wheels, National seating and Isringhausen driver seats.

Calendar

APRIL 2005

15-17 The Motor Bus Society Convention, Holiday Inn-Civic Center, San Francisco. Info: Go to www.motorbussociety.org, or e-mail glsquier@comcast.net.

16-21 Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance Annual Conference, Hyatt Regency Albuquerque and Albuquerque Convention Center, Albuquerque, N.M. Info: www.cvsa.org.

19 Ontario Transportation Expo, International Centre, Mississauga, Ont. Info: Go to www.ote.ca.

MAY 2005

3-7 Travel Industry Association 37th Annual International Pow Wow, New York City. Info: (202) 408-8422 or go to www.tia.org.

Movie presents tale of bus riding sisters

NEW YORK CITY — The touching story of a mentally challenged woman who rides buses nine hours a day, six days a week is the basis of a movie that will air May 1 on CBS-TV.

The Hallmark Hall of Fame production of *Riding the Bus with My Sister* stars Andie MacDowell and Rosie O'Donnell. It is directed by Anjelica Huston.

MacDowell and O'Donnell por-

tray real-life sisters Rachel and Beth Simon. Rachel Simon authored a book on which the movie is based.

Before Beth Simon started riding buses, she lived in a group home surrounded by other mentally challenged individuals. One day she decides to go out, get on a bus and see what would happen. Ultimately she found a whole new world, a whole new life, and a new whole family.

When their father dies, the successful and driven Rachel comes home to be with her sister for what's supposed to be a short visit. Initially the women spar. As time passes, they reach an uneasy truce and then an understanding.

Rachel joins Beth on her daily bus rides, chronicles them and turns the daily adventures into a book. The movie airs Sunday evening, May 1, on CBS.



Rosie O'Donnell and Andie MacDowell. Photo by Ben Mark Holzberg

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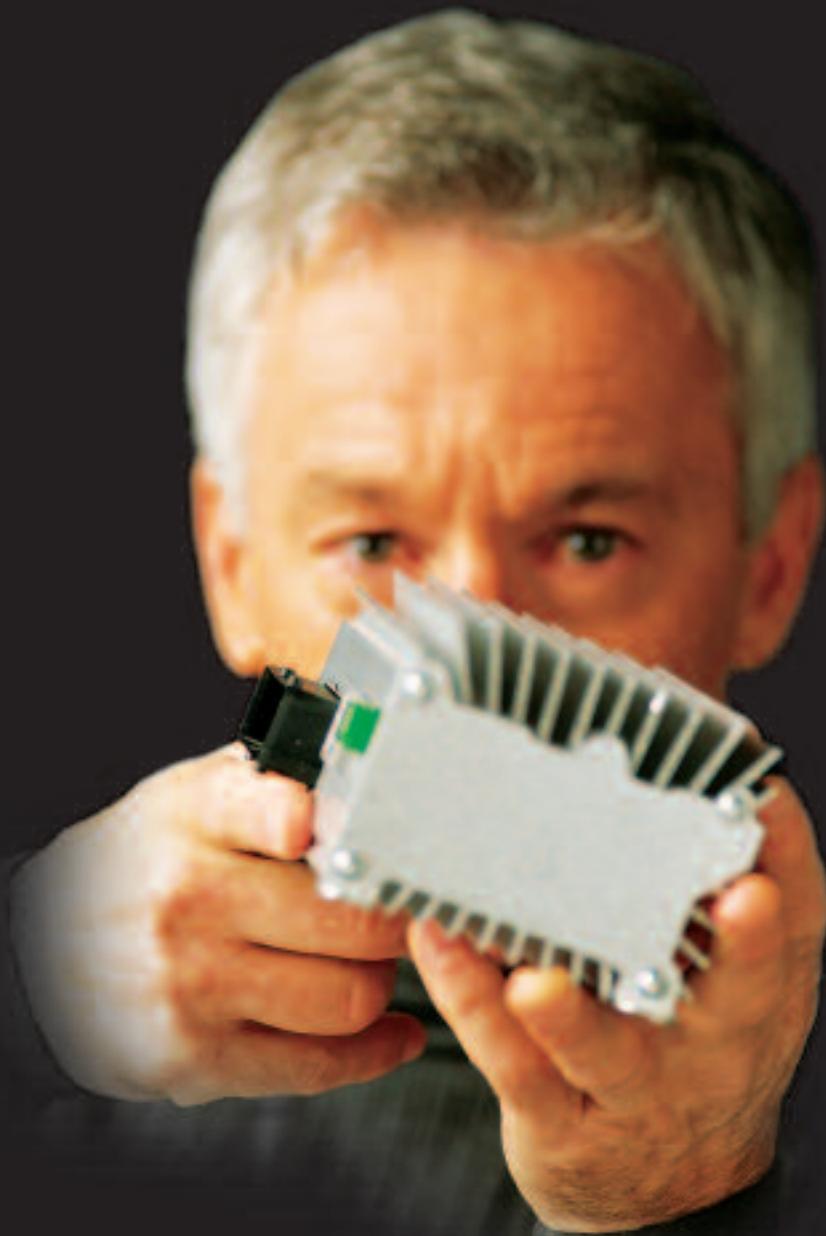
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