

Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE BUS INDUSTRY

Can a tiny state association succeed? Oklahomans try

OKLAHOMA CITY — A failed attempt to build a new four-state motorcoach association in the Southwest has led to the creation of a new state trade organization in Oklahoma and a close relationship with that state's trucking industry.

The Oklahoma Motorcoach Association not only is up and running but it has already scored some success with its main mission of

looking out for motorcoach carriers at the state legislature.

However, because the fledgling organization has only eight dues-paying members, it had to look outside the coach industry to make it happen. It partnered with the Oklahoma Trucking Association, and is using its professional lobbyist to tend to its legislative business.

"I know the combination of

trucks and buses hasn't always worked well in other states, but it seems to be working well here," says association president Robert O'Brien of Time Lines in Oklahoma City. "It was worth the chance because as small as we are there was no way we could afford a fulltime lobbyist."

The new association had about a dozen members when the group

first got together, but three of the operators have since gone out of business, leaving it with eight of the 12 or so carriers based in the state.

O'Brien said the lobbying efforts this year won the industry legislation that exempts motorcoach companies from state sales taxes and sets the same minimum liability insurance standard for both intrastate and interstate carriers.

The new motorcoach association actually is the product of a failed effort to put together a regional association of operators from Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas and New Mexico. Formed early last year, the four-state group hired an executive director and was in the midst of developing an agenda when it collapsed because too many

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Martz Group innovates, adjusts to cope with times, stay on top

WILKES-BARRE, Pa. — The company slogan at The Martz Group isn't a variation of the saying about "teaching old dogs new tricks" ... but it could be.

That's because the folks at The Martz Group have been through both tough times and good, always managing to change and improve, making the best of either situation. And, they've been doing it for nearly 100 years.

The mix of business challenges has ranged from the financial collapse of a successful airline service and the death of the company president in a helicopter crash, to the development of an extensive line-run operation and

the co-founding of a national bus transportation system.

More recently, it was tested by the economic downturn of the late 1990s, leading to a company overhaul and streamlining, the adopting of new policies and mandates, and an upgrading of its safety system, resulting in a reduction in accident frequency.

Earlier this year, The Martz Group and its long-time chairman, Frank M. Henry, received two of the motorcoach industry's top honors in recognition of its achievements in recent years.

In presentations made at Motorcoach Expo 2005 in Las Vegas, Henry was given the United

Motorcoach Association *Safety Leader of the Year Award*, the top safety honor in the over-the-road bus industry. And, the Martz Group and Henry were the co-recipients of the *UMA Vision Award*, which honors outstanding operator innovation, business practices and safety, along with Carl R. Bieber Tourways and its president, Steven Haddad.

More recently, Henry received the *Industry Vanguard Award* for his personal and professional accomplishments, and industry influence and leadership. The award was presented by the Trailways Transportation System.

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New safety features to be stock on MCIs

SCHAUMBURG, Ill. — Motor Coach Industries is about to become the first coach manufacturer in North America to add three important safety innovations as standard equipment on its coaches: a tire-pressure monitoring system, a fire suppression system, and in-bumper back-up sensors.

Pete Cotter, MCI senior vice president of sales, said that including the three systems on new coaches will help customers protect their investment. "Adding these value-added technologies as standard features enhances safety while helping to lower operational costs," said Cotter.

The Amerex Fire Suppression System that will become standard on all MCI models beginning in the third quarter of this year is designed to warn drivers and suppress fires in their earliest stages, protecting both passengers and the coach. In the event of a fire, the system automatically suppresses flames with a special agent, limiting damage and minimizing downtime.

Amerex is one of North America's leading manufacturers of fire-fighting equipment.

The SmarTire™ system being installed on MCIs monitors both

tire pressure and temperature, and warns drivers of tire-related problems via the dashboard control panel. A small, wireless sensor is mounted on each wheel and collects temperature and pressure data. This data is transmitted to a receiver and is output on the dash display.

A red and yellow LED display will indicate if the pressure in a tire falls below an established setting or if the air temperature in a tire rises above a certain level while the coach is moving.

"SmarTire not only serves as an asset-protection device, it simplifies pre-trip inspections and should make it easier to prevent unscheduled downtime, and help to improve tire wear and fuel efficiency," said Bryan Couch, MCI vice president of product development and technical support.

As an option, MCI will offer an upgraded version of SmarTire. The more sophisticated unit will include a digital display that gives the pressure and temperature of each tire to readily identify any tire that's a problem. The digital display SmarTire system also will be available soon as an aftermarket retrofit through MCI Fleet Support.

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Company entices operators to outsource tour planning

LAS VEGAS — Motorcoach operators that don't have much of a group tour-planning department can try a new approach to get the job done.

Compass Tours of Las Vegas is offering a training and planning package that provides operators with full-service tour planning for

a fraction of the cost of what they probably would spend on their own.

"We like to tell them to consider us their tour planning department, but off site," says company president Rodney Hill, a tour operator in the Pacific Northwest and West for more than 20 years.

Hill, who operates Americana Tours in Las Vegas, and Marcus Tucker, who operates Custom Tours in Pasco, Wash., began working on the concept about four years ago and are in the beginning stages of marketing it to motorcoach operators in the United States and Canada.

Actually, it's the second launch of the service.

The first effort earlier in the year failed to attract much attention because the program was tough to explain to operators. "They all had the preconceived notion we just sold tours, and we don't," said Hill. "It was very dif-

ficult to get them to understand what we do so we had to go back to the drawing board."

For their second try, they developed a detailed "member perspective" that outlines the program and how operators will benefit by being a part of it. "Once

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Keys to Success

Diversifying, luck help operator grow

PLACENTIA, Calif. — While Tony Fiorini believes diversity and relationships make for business success, he's among the first to acknowledge that it's always good to be riding a bit of good luck as well.

That's just what the president of Silver State Coach of Placentia was doing when the 9-11 terrorist attacks sent the travel industry into a steep nosedive that forced many motorcoach operators to downsize and lots of them to shut down.

Silver State several months earlier had decided to expand into the gaming industry and obtained a lucrative contract to shuttle gam-

blers to Harrah's Rincon Casino in north San Diego County.

"Fortunately, people kept going to the casinos after 9-11, so our business stayed steady and then grew without the major impact that many of my fellow bus people experienced," said Fiorini, who runs the business with his wife, Jill.

Founded nearly 20 years ago in Reno, Nev., as a small bus leasing company and converted into a two-coach operating business in the Los Angeles area 10 years ago, Silver State has more than doubled the size of its fleet since 9-11.

During its first five years as an

operating company, the business added a dozen coaches through the purchase of new buses and the acquisition of two small motorcoach companies. When 9-11 struck, it had 14 coaches. Today it has 34.

"We never planned to grow this big. Our original intent was to have just eight coaches, so my wife and I could run the office and we would only need to hire one mechanic and a few drivers," said Fiorini. "How does that work? It just happens. You get a little more work and then a little more work."

Fiorini points to two successful business strategies that caused him to change course and grow



beyond his initial plan — becoming diversified and building strong relationships with everybody.

In addition to the normal charter work that every bus company relies on heavily, Silver State moved into other areas that spread

its revenue sources.

It started a small operation in Hemet, Calif., where most of its customers are snowbirds — most of them Canadians — who favor short one-day trips around

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THE DOCKET

No Relief Diesel to remain priced thru 2006

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Energy expects average retail diesel fuel prices to remain above regular gasoline prices through next year.

In its latest Short-Term Energy Outlook, the DOE projected the average price for retail diesel this summer will be \$2.22 per gallon, up about 45 cents a gallon from last summer. That's roughly 10 cents a gallon below recent national average prices, suggesting the DOE projection may be ultra conservative.

National retail prices of diesel have been higher than gasoline for more than 40 straight weeks, a record, according to DOE's Energy Administration, which tracks prices. The previous record was 37 weeks from August 1996 through May 1997.

Distillate demand, which includes diesel and heating oil, is projected to climb by an average of 1.9 percent this year and next, which EIA described as "steady growth but well below the average rate of 3.3 percent recorded for 2004."

Retail gasoline national average prices are projected to be \$2.17 a gallon through September.

State & Provincial Fuel Tax Rates

A handful of states and provinces boosted fuel tax rates during the first quarter of 2005. Here are the updated rates for all states and provinces, plus the federal tax rate in the U.S.

State	Gasoline	Diesel	State	Gasoline	Diesel
Alabama	16	19	North Carolina	26.6	26.6
Alaska	8	8	North Dakota	21	21
Arizona	18	26	Ohio	28	28
Arkansas	21.7	22.7	Oklahoma	16	13
California	36.48	29.5	Oregon	24	0
Colorado	22	20.5	Pennsylvania	30	36.4
Connecticut	31	32	Rhode Island	30	30
Delaware	23	22	South Carolina	16.75	16.75
D.C.	20	20	South Dakota	24	24
Florida	26.47	29.37	Tennessee	21.4	18.4
Georgia	12.6	12.77	Texas	20	20
Hawaii	16	16	Utah	24.5	24.5
Idaho	25	25	Vermont	20	26
Illinois	29.8	32.5	Virginia	19.9	19.9
Indiana	29.8	27.8	Washington	28	28
Iowa	21.5	23.5	West Virginia	27	27
Kansas	24	26	Wisconsin	32.9	32.9
Kentucky	19.8	20.1	Wyoming	14	14
Louisiana	20	20	U.S.	18.4	24.4
Maine	26.18	26.82	<i>Tax Rate in U.S. is cents per gallon</i>		
Maryland	23.5	24.25	Province	Gasoline	Diesel
Massachusetts	21	21	Alberta	9	9
Michigan	29.875	27.675	British Columbia	14.5	15
Minnesota	20	20	Manitoba	11.5	11.5
Mississippi	18.4	18.4	New Brunswick	14.5	16.9
Missouri	17	17	Newfoundland	16.5	16.5
Montana	27.75	28.5	Nova Scotia	15.5	15.4
Nebraska	25.7	25.1	Ontario	14.7	14.3
Nevada	23.81	27.81	Prince Edward Is.	19.6	19.3
New Hampshire	20.625	20.625	Quebec	15.2	16.2
New Jersey	14.5	17.5	Saskatchewan	15	15
New Mexico	18.875	22.875	<i>Tax Rate in Canada = cents per liter</i>		
New York	35.3	35.35			

Speed-limited tires on CVSA agenda

WASHINGTON — A recommendation that the Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance develop an out-of-service standard for speed-limited tires has been referred to the CVSA Passenger Carrier Committee for action.

The recommendation was made by the National Transportation Safety Board following its investigation of a fatal motorcoach crash that occurred in October 2003, near Tallulah, La. (See June 15 and May 1 issues of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

The NTSB found that the coach was using tires designed for transit

buses, not over-the-road highway coaches that travel at speeds of more than 55 miles per hour. Although they were not a factor in the crash, the NTSB expressed concern about their use and asked the CVSA to look at the issue.

In a memo to the NTSB, CVSA Executive Director Stephen Campbell said the Passenger Carrier Committee will consult with the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration Passenger Carrier Technical Advisory Group and consider a potential amendment to the *North American Standard Out-of-Service Criteria* for speed-limited tires.

Should the Passenger Carrier Committee come up with a safety recommendation, the issue will go to the CVSA Executive Committee for consideration and then to the CVSA membership. Prompt action by the various CVSA levels could result in a new out-of-service standard for speed-limited tires in the April 2006 criteria.

CVSA is a nonprofit organization of state and federal motor carrier safety officials. Among other things, it publishes the *North American Standard Out-of-Service Criteria* for over-the-road buses and trucks.

July 4 weekend will set travel records

CHICAGO — More Americans will travel around the Fourth of July than have ever traveled for a holiday weekend, according to AAA's holiday travel forecast.

The auto travel group estimates that 40.3 million Amer-

icans will travel 50 miles or more from home this holiday, up 2.8 percent from the 39.2 million who traveled last year.

About 33.9 million travelers, or 84 percent of all holiday travelers, expect to travel by private motor vehicle, a 2.6 percent rise

from last year, AAA said.

Another 4.6 million, or 11 percent, plan to travel by airplane, up 4.2 percent from last year, and a projected 1.8 million vacationers, or 5 percent, will travel by train, bus or other mode of transportation.

FMCSA likes idea of medical examiner list; certifier wins plaudits

ARLINGTON, Va. — The administrator of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration has endorsed language in the Senate version of the federal highway and public transit reauthorization bill that calls for establishing a national registry of individuals certified to perform medical examinations of commercial vehicle drivers.

FMCSA Administrator Annette Sandberg told a public meeting here late last month her agency supports language in the Senate bill requiring that a national registry of medical examiners be maintained by the U.S. Department of Transportation.

The provision is in the bill thanks in large measure to the efforts of the United Motorcoach Association.

The FMCSA conducted a public session June 22 to explore the controversial concept of a national registry, and to hear from experts. Sandberg kicked off the forum.

For more than 25 years, the federal government has been considering the idea of certifying individuals to perform medical exams of over-the-road bus and truck drivers. For much of that time, however, the issue has lain dormant.

New life was breathed into the concept following a bus crash near New Orleans that killed more than 20 people on Mother's Day 1999. The driver of the bus had several life-threatening medical conditions but a physician had signed off on his physical exam, allowing him to drive.

After that, UMA, ABA and others began pushing for medical examiner certification and an approved provider list.

Meanwhile, a new organization that seeks to certify the proficiency of medical professionals who conduct DOT driver exams has gained important endorsements and has been recognized by the Mount Sinai

School of Medicine in New York.

The organization is the National Academy of DOT Medical Examiners and it was formed to improve the quality of professional knowledge and skills of medical professionals performing DOT medical exams. (See June 1 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

Last month it was announced that the Mount Sinai Medical School has certified an online learning system developed by the academy. Beginning this month, Mount Sinai will award six continuing medical education credit hours to medical examiners completing the academy's training program.

Mount Sinai's educational credits will be available not only to physicians who hold either a medical doctor or doctor of osteopathic medicine degree, but also to chiropractors, physician assistants and nurse practitioners.

In addition to receiving credits, medical examiners passing the academy's examination — after completing the training — will be awarded certification in recognition of having demonstrated their knowledge and understanding of DOT requirements. Two insurance companies also have endorsed the academy.

Robert Crescenzo, vice president of safety and loss control at Lancer Insurance Co., said Lancer applauds the establishment of the academy and fully supports its mission. A similar endorsement came from James Nobel, director of the commercial auto line of business at Zurich Services Corp., who said the academy's training and certification programs will address many of the concerns expressed by the National Transportation Safety Board and will increase Zurich's level of confidence in the knowledge and proficiency of certified medical examiners.

Transit seeks charter firms

The following public transit provider has informed the United Motorcoach Association of its intent to provide charter bus service unless willing and able private operators step forward to offer their services or to bid on contract opportunities. UMA urges appropriate

operators to take the time to respond to this notice:

Owensboro, Ky. Deadline: July 5, 2005. Write to: Louis Lindsay, Transit Manager, City of Owensboro, P.O. Box 10003, Owensboro, KY 42302. Phone: (270) 687-8570.

Coach crash in New York work zone spurs legislation

ALBANY, N.Y. — A motorcoach crash that killed three highway workers has promoted the introduction of state legislation designed to reduce the possibility of serious accidents in roadway work zones.

New York State Sen. Thomas W. Libous, R-Binghamton, said his Work Zone Safety Act would:

- Call for a 60-day driver license suspension when someone is convicted of two or more speeding violations in a work zone.
- Mandate police presence in major work zones.
- Require radar speed display signs in major work zones.
- Fund a safety education campaign with a \$50 surcharge on all speeding violations in work zones.

DC Circulator begins service

WASHINGTON — The downtown Washington DC Circulator will begin service Sunday, July 10.

The circulator will use a fleet of 29 low-floor Van Hool buses to connect many of the city's tourist spots and major business centers. It will operate seven days a week from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m., transporting residents, workers and visitors along two initial routes:

- An east-west link between Union Station and Georgetown along K Street, N.W.
- A north-south route connecting the Southwest Waterfront with the Convention Center via the Mall and 7th Street, N.W.

Patrons using the service will pay \$1 per ride or they can purchase a ticket at fare machines on sidewalks along the designated routes. Riders will flash their tickets to "checkers" on the buses.

The circulator will run at 5- to 10-minute intervals.

The Van Hool buses seat 55 and feature three, street-level doors and large windows. There will be 24 buses in service with five buses in reserve.

The district's Department of Transportation owns the circulator. The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority manages the service, and First Transit, a private-sector transit company, will operate it. (See the June 1 issue of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

The district, the federal government and city businesses that supported the service will help fund operating costs. Annual ridership is expected to reach 4.6 million when the system is fully implemented in 2008.

For more information, go to www.dccirculator.com.

The proposal follows a May 20 crash on Interstate 81 in Chenango, N.Y., that killed three highway workers. A tour coach slammed into a work zone, killing Jonathon Randall, 32, and Wayne Bonsell, 39, both of Binghamton, and Jason Pessoni, 30, of

Cincinnatus.

The bus driver was seriously injured.

Libous' bill is the product of hours of meetings with state transportation and motor vehicle representatives, laborers, contractors, state police and highway safety

officials.

"One of the things I didn't want to do right after the accident is have a knee-jerk reaction and just put in legislation," Libous said.

Joseph H. Compagni, president of the paving company

whose crew was working at the I-81 site, sees the threat of license suspensions and police presence as the key provisions of the bill. "People do not risk their licenses," he said.

A state assembly version of Libous' bill also was introduced.

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Pennsylvania coach owner Carl Bieber Jr. dies at 62

ALLENTOWN, Pa. — Carl R. Bieber Jr., retired president of Carl R. Bieber Tourways of Kutztown, Pa., died last month. He was 62.

Mr. Bieber, a former Marine and Vietnam War veteran, grew up in the coach company founded by his father in 1946. He joined the

company after attending The Citadel and Susquehanna University and completing his military service, becoming president in 1976.

Carl R. Bieber Tourways is a high-profile coach company in the Lehigh Valley of Pennsylvania, carrying thousands of commuters daily

to major eastern cities and tourists to destinations nationwide. The company has frequently appeared on lists of the nation's largest private coach operators.

In 1991, following the death of his father, Mr. Bieber became owner of the business. Ten years

later, he sold it to his general manager, Steven Haddad, who operates the company — under the Bieber name — today.

Mr. Bieber was a member of the Lutheran Church, Kutztown Lions Club and Huguenot Masonic Lodge, and a former board member of the Kutztown and Allentown fair associations, Moselem Springs Golf Club and Forest Lake Club.

He was born in Allentown and graduated from high school in Kutztown, where the company is based.

He is survived by his widow, Victoria; a son, Brent; a daughter, Jessica, and two sisters.

A memorial has been established with the American Cancer Society at 3893 Adler Place, Bethlehem, PA 18107.



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Safety Features

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

The in-bumper back-up sensor will detect obstacles when backing. Status is monitored through the control panel and communicated to the driver by LED indicators and audible alarm warning.

"This feature creates a much safer situation and will help to reduce body damage," said Couch. "We're very pleased to be the first coach manufacturer in North America to offer it as a standard feature."

Initially, MCI's back-up sensor will be available only on E4500 and J4500 models. It will be added to D models by the end of the year.

MCI declined to specify how much the safety equipment will add to the base price of a new coach, saying only that "prices will be increased to reflect the cost associated with the additional features."

Meanwhile, MCI has launched a summer sales event that includes

major prizes. Through Aug. 27, the MCI Experiences Event allows coach operators that buy new and pre-owned MCI coaches, parts, Signature Shop items, training, maintenance or repair services to be entered in prize drawings.

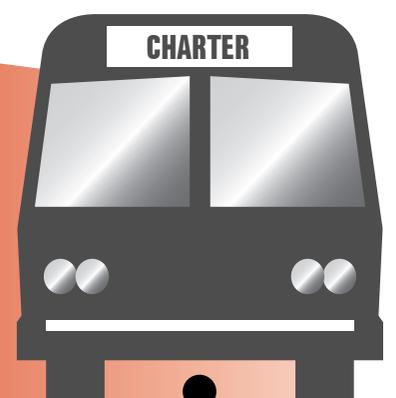
Operators will receive one entry for every \$1,000 their company spends with MCI. The grand prize is a two-year lease on a Cadillac XLR sports car. Other prizes include Carefree Resort Escape resort stays; a 51-inch, high-definition projection TV; a Poulan Pro Tractor, or a Bose DVD home theater system.

Drawings will take place in mid-July and mid-August, with the grand prize Cadillac-lease drawing in mid-September.

The MCI Experiences Event is open only to commercial motorcoach operators and tour companies in the U.S. and Canada. Details and rules can be found on the MCI Web site at www.mcicoach.com/experiences.

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Engine incentives: Step One

Three U.S. senators have introduced legislation that would give bus and truck fleets a 5 percent tax credit on the purchase of 2007-model, heavy-duty vehicles equipped with cleaner burning diesel engines.

The bill also would allow for expensing the full purchase price of those vehicles on a single year's tax return.

Sen. Gordon Smith, R-Ore., introduced the incentives bill last month to "ensure the widest possible distribution of this clean-diesel technology" into the U.S. bus and truck fleet.

'Buyers of new over-the-road buses and trucks may initially be reluctant to purchase 2007 models.'

An industry lobbyist says the bill could become a part of the comprehensive energy bill that is now before the Senate.

Smith's bill was co-sponsored by Sens. Blanche Lincoln, D-Ark., and Lamar Alexander, R-Tenn., and offers incentives for motor carriers to purchase 2007-model trucks and buses with their lower-emission engines in the first year they are made.

There is mounting concern, just as there was in 2002, that buyers of new over-the-road trucks and buses may initially be reluctant to purchase 2007 models because they will be equipped with engines that emit much lower levels of particulate matter and nitrogen oxides.

A coalition, composed mainly of trucking industry interests, has been urging Congress for months to consider legislation offering tax

incentives for new vehicles as a way to ease the transition to the cleaner burning engines beginning in 2007.

Advocates say that enacting a short-term tax incentive would put the cost of the latest clean-diesel technology on a level playing field with the cost of today's vehicles.

It would assure that companies have the financial ability to purchase the cleaner diesels so the nation can reap the full air quality benefits intended by EPA's clean-diesel rule.

Clearly, clean air comes at a price, and if motorcoach companies and truckers aren't willing to pay the price then the air won't be cleaned as quickly as policymakers anticipate.

The motorcoaches and trucks that are equipped with the clean-diesel engines that meet the EPA regulation in 2007 will have innovative emissions control technology that will increase purchase and maintenance costs.

The burden of these costs mainly will fall on truckers and, to a lesser extent, on the coach industry. If these costs are too high, carriers will try to avoid purchasing the 2007-model vehicles. Instead, companies might buy used trucks and buses, recondition their existing fleets, or buy more new buses and trucks before the new engines come to market.

Congress must understand that the EPA's projected environmental benefits will materialize only if trucking companies and bus operators can afford to purchase the cleaner, more expensive vehicles equipped with the clean-diesel engines.

It appears Sens. Smith, Lincoln and Alexander understand that reality. Let's hope their colleagues see the light as well.

Good News Roundup

House votes for 7(a) loan program

WASHINGTON — In a surprise vote, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a bill to restore funding to the U.S. Small Business Administration 7(a) loan program.

An amendment containing money for the program was added to the House version of the fiscal 2006 Science, State, Justice and Commerce appropriation bill. It was adopted when 36 Republicans joined House Democrats in voting for the measure (234 aye, 189 nay, 10 not voting).

The provision was adopted despite strenuous objections from

House Appropriations Chairman Frank Wolf, R-Va., and Small Business Committee Chairman Don Manzullo, R-Ill., who voted against the amendment. The appropriations bill containing the 7(a) amendment now goes to the Senate where its fate is uncertain.

The House fight to restore the 7(a) program to the fiscal 2004 funding level of \$79 million was led by Rep. Nydia Velazquez of New York, ranking Democrat on the House Small Business Committee.

The 7(a) program long has been a favorite of motorcoach

operators. Funding for the program was eliminated last year, which doubled the cost for both small businesses and lenders, adding \$1,500 to \$3,000 in upfront fees and, for larger loans, fees are now as much as \$50,000. Following the fee increases, the cost of the program rose, the number of lenders declined and the size of loans shrank.

Congresswomen Velazquez and Rep. Steve LaTourette, R-Ohio, worked with a coalition of 15 trade associations, including the United Motorcoach Association, to win passage of the amendment.

Coach market improves in Canada

TORONTO — Motor Coach Canada says the bus industry is stirring north of the border.

The association points to increases this year in the sale of Prevost and MCI coaches to Canadian operators, plus upswings in student tours and advanced bookings from the inbound Asian market.

"After the problems of 2002 and 2003, it is great to see operators investing in new equipment

and the rebound of two of our major markets," said Brian Crow, president of Motor Coach Canada. "The one concern we have is being able to get enough equipment and drivers to meet demand in certain parts of Canada this fall."

Crow noted that the student tour market has been "very strong" this year, while the number of Asian tourists is on par or above last year's level.

He also quoted from a new study that also provides other indications of recovery of the coach market in Canada. For example, 144,000 coaches enter Banff Park annually; 85,000 enter Niagara Falls; 7,000 travel to the CN Tower in Toronto, and more than 75,000 travel to Quebec City.

"A rebound to these numbers contributes greatly to the tourism community," Crow said.

Tour operators diversify products

LEXINGTON, Ky. — New research from the National Tour Association indicates tour operators are adapting their businesses — to today's changing marketplace — by offering a broader range of products.

The study of NTA-member tour operators shows that nearly all (96 percent) offer escorted group tours. More than half of the opera-

tors (51 percent) offer one-day sightseeing tours, with the same number offering receptive services to other tour operators.

Additionally, nearly half (49 percent) of the companies offer independent packages — a 26 percent increase from 2003. Thirty-five percent of the member companies offer sightseeing tours as a component of conferences and

conventions, while 18 percent are involved with some or all of the components of meeting planning.

Finally, 15 percent of companies offer an independent charter service with their own motorcoaches to groups other than the ones traveling on their regular group tours.

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Unit Chemical relocates to new Las Vegas-area facility

HENDERSON, NEVADA — Unit Chemical Corporation, manufacturer of POT SHOT™ toilet deodorants, has moved its headquarters to the Las Vegas area to better serve its most important business, the motorcoach industry.

Unit Chemical's new facility is more than three times larger than its previous 55-year-old Los Angeles location. It also sits on more than two acres of land, offering ample motorcoach parking.

The new facility is easily accessible from the U.S. 95 freeway and is close to the Sunset Station Casino off Warm Springs Road.

"The fact that the Las Vegas market is centralized and that it is a destination for so many motorcoach operators allows us to offer a new sales program we have coined, "pick-up pricing," said company Vice President Mike Chaplar.

With freight costs becoming a larger percentage of a product's total cost, says Chaplar, Unit

Chemical feels that a good way to reduce prices is to offer operators an option where they can stop by its facility and pick up the cleaning and deodorizing products they need, eliminating the freight component. Out-of-state customers will save even more because they will not be charged sales tax.

"This is only one way we save

our customer's money," notes Unit Chemical President Ray Chaplar. "We have designed all of our products to minimize the amount of water that goes into the formulation. In fact, some of our liquid products do not contain one drop of added water. Adding water to a product only increases weight, adding to the freight cost and thus

increasing the ultimate price to the customer. Water does not add value."

Since 1949, Unit Chemical, a family-owned and operated company, has been providing motorcoach operators with disinfectant, deodorant and professional cleaning products. "From its inception, Unit Chemical has been a pioneer in

environmentally safe products," said Ray Chaplar.

The company introduced POT SHOT, the first non-formaldehyde liquid deodorant product designed for use in motorcoach holding tanks, more than 30 years ago. For more information, go to www.unitchemical.com, or call (800) 879-8648.

LFS shuttle is unveiled by Nova Bus

SAINT-EUSTACHE, Quebec — Nova Bus has introduced the Nova LFS Shuttle designed specifically for high-traffic situations.

The 40-foot bus offers improved maneuverability, compared to other low-floor shuttles, plus high durability.

"This initiative is part of our ongoing strategy to bring innovative solutions to both private and public operators in North America," said Gilles Dion, president and CEO at Nova Bus.

"The Nova LFS has proven its reliability and durability with nearly 3,000 units sold over the past nine years. We feel this new shuttle vehicle will meet our clients' growing needs and we are convinced it will represent added-value to any fleet operator," Dion added.

The LFS Shuttle differs from conventional LFS models in that it has a wider door in back, facilitating quick passenger entry and exit; a great variety of seating configurations; the availability of luggage racks, and a wide aisle, which also will ease passenger movement.

For disabled passengers, the Nova LFS features an easy-access ramp for simple boarding and exiting.

The new model was designed for airports, parking facilities, hotels and resorts, rental car companies and others needing high-capacity shuttles.

Nova Bus is a division of Prevost Car and is owned by Volvo Bus Corp. For information go to www.novabus.com.

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Oklahoma

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

members failed to pay their dues.

"We ran out of money and had to give it up," said O'Brien.

However, a few of the operators who wanted to give it one more shot agreed to try to put together smaller coalitions in their own areas that eventually could again link up as a single regional organization.

"It turns out we were the only ones able to do it," added O'Brien, who, along with Jeff Polzein of Red Carpet Charters, put up the initial funds to get the group off the ground.

Recognizing, though, that they would never be large or wealthy enough to hire their own lobbyist, the Oklahoma carriers turned to the trucking association and its executive director and lobbyist Dan Case for help. The truckers responded favorably and for an annual fee agreed to give motorcoach operators a seat on their board of direc-

tors and allowed them full use of their lobbyist.

"What we needed was a combination lobbyist and legislative watchdog," said O'Brien. "Now, any time the word 'bus' comes up or if he even thinks something might apply to us, we're notified."

Case said the marriage is a good one, too, mostly because the trucking and motorcoach industries have much in common, including tax and fuel issues. "They had some needs and they felt that the best way to meet those needs was to join with us," he said.

While the failed regional group gets credit for being the catalyst for the association's birth, it was a state sales tax issue that put everybody in Oklahoma on the same page from the get-go. The State Tax Commission decided to begin enforcing an old law that required motorcoach carriers to pay sales taxes on their business, and was considering making the requirement retroactive.

The motorcoach carriers argued that the bulk of their business was transporting school, college, church and nonprofit groups, all of which are exempt from paying state sales taxes. Their few other customers, they contended, would produce very little revenue for the state, probably not even enough to cover the cost of collecting the tax.

The tax commission eventually bought the reasoning and eventually agreed to add a motorcoach exemption to the main tax package it presented to the state legislature this year. Lawmakers, after some intense lobbying, passed the proposal in April on the last day of their legislative session.

In addition to the sales tax issue prodding the carriers to get together, the motorcoach operators still had a bitter taste in their mouths from a few years back when they had nobody at the state capital looking after their interests and lawmakers gave truckers a big break on the

state excise taxes during a campaign to try to attract more truck terminals to the state.

Legislators ignored the motorcoach industry in the tax measure, leaving bus operators to continue paying a substantially higher tax on new equipment. Truckers now pay about \$500 in excise tax when they register a new truck, while motorcoach operators pay \$12,000 to \$14,000 in registration fees and taxes for a new coach.

"Had someone not been asleep at the switch or been involved from the bus industry, it would have been very easy to include buses in that tax package," suggested O'Brien.

The association now is campaigning with the truckers against a Sept. 13 state ballot issue that would raise gasoline taxes by 5 cents a gallon to 21 cents and diesel fuel taxes 8 cents to 22 cents, and is studying other issues to tackle when lawmakers get together again next year. Among them are the high

price of fuel, illegal motorcoach operators and insurance costs.

And on the back burner is the excise tax issue.

O'Brien said the truckers are concerned that if the coach operators were to push lawmakers to reduce the excise tax for the motorcoach industry, they might turn around and increase it for truckers. "Revenue negative issues are not very popular in our state right now," he said. "But the truckers agreed that when the time is ripe, they would support a proposal to have it changed to include buses in the deal."

He said he's looking to grow the organization to include every motorcoach operator in the state, noting that those who do not belong will not have their voices heard at the legislature. "We still have some work to do, some arms to twist to get people to sign up," he said. "But those of us who are committed to fund it no matter what are going to keep it going."

Compass

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

they find out what we're all about, then that generates some excitement," said Hill.

He said while the company plans to market the program to all motorcoach operators, it has identified 82 gateway cities in the U.S. and Canada and wants to have one carrier signed on in at least 30 of them before actually beginning the service.

The concept involves individual operators putting together their own local tours of less than five days, and Compass setting up their longer and more elaborate tours.

"The operators know their own areas and their own customers and can best plan their short, local tours," said Hill.

Compass then arranges the major tours — those it recommends and those requested by member operators. It maps the routes, books the hotels, restaurants and

attractions and arranges side trips. It will then turn the packages over to the operators to market to their own customers.

Hill said the company will put together trips two years in advance, which will allow operators to plan their businesses better because they will know where they will be traveling down the road.

At the same time, Compass puts together fly trips as well, getting people to those 82 gateway

cities from anywhere in the United States and Canada where they would take bus tours run by the member company in each of those cities.

To get started, operators pay \$1,835 for a 30-lesson training class that they take via the Internet. The lessons cover all facets of the tour industry — from setting up short tours to selling and operating both short and multi-day tours.

And, that's all they pay. There

is no membership fee, no annual fee and no additional cost for the tour planning. Compass makes its money through commissions it gets from the hotels, restaurants and attractions it books for the tours.

"That way the operators get 100 percent of the profit from each of their tours," Hill emphasizes. "And, they will have much more time to run their businesses without having to worry about tour planning."

He said the need for such a service is emphasized by the changing tour market, especially serving baby boomers who want to go on active trips and are not content with sitting in a bus and just looking out the window.

"A lot of motorcoach companies just don't have the experience for this market," says Hill, adding that Compass' action trips include stopovers for jet skiing, hiking and snowmobiling.

Hill said he got the idea for the service when he began seeing that many motorcoach operators were spending too much time working on multiday tours and not enough time on local tours. "I kept thinking there should be a business like this so that community-based operators would have more time to do what they do best, serve their local customers and provide them with good service," he said.

He sees Compass as a bargain for operators. "Research and planning long trips is expensive and I think we can plan them at less cost than they would be able to do on their own," he said.

More information can be found at www.compassmembership.com.

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Coach USA/Coach Canada post 2005 sales, profit gains

PERTH, Scotland — Stagecoach Group PLC reports that its North American subsidiaries, Coach USA and Coach Canada, had much-improved financial results for fiscal 2005.

Stagecoach said Coach USA/Coach Canada had sales for the year ended April 30 of \$396 million, up 12.7 percent from fiscal 2004 sales of \$351.3 million.

Earnings from continuing operations for the 12 months ended April 30 were \$27.4 million, or 7.9 percent higher than fiscal 2004 profits of \$25.4 million.

The combined companies' operating margin for fiscal 2005 was 6.7 percent, up from 4.4 percent in fiscal 2004.

Stagecoach said its strongest

North America growth during the past year was in its charter and sightseeing markets, which posted a 26.4 percent increase in sales.

Additionally, nearly 29 percent more tickets were sold in fiscal 2005 by its New York Sightseeing service, which operates double-decker tour buses in the city.

At the same time, the line- and commuter-run services operated by Coach USA and Coach Canada were up 7.8 percent during the year ended April 30. The company's school bus and other contract services posted a 6.2 percent revenue gain for the year.

Stagecoach noted that Coach USA and Coach Canada have launched new Web sites designed to further simulate growth by incorpo-

rating online sales. To see them, go to www.coachusa.com or www.coachcanada.com.

Capital spending by Coach USA/Coach Canada in fiscal 2005 totaled \$61.59 million, versus \$42.09 million in fiscal 2004.

The company continued to reduce its losses from the disposal of operations. Its loss in fiscal 2005 was \$10.75 million, down from \$12.94 million in fiscal 2004.

Stagecoach also reported that its fuel hedging operation helped

cap some of its variable diesel fuel costs. Had it not had a hedging program, a \$10 a barrel increase in the price of diesel fuel would have impacted its annual fuel costs by \$18 million to \$19 million.

Laidlaw to overhaul debt, including Greyhound Lines

NAPERVILLE, Ill. — Laidlaw International, parent company of Greyhound Lines and a major provider of school and public transit services, has announced plans to recapitalize its balance sheet.

Laidlaw will use the proceeds from a new bank credit facility, plus its own cash, to retire existing debt of roughly \$560 million, including more than \$150 million in Greyhound debt.

"The sale of (Laidlaw's) healthcare companies earlier in the year enabled us to focus on (our) core transportation businesses, while also substantially strengthening the balance sheet," said Kevin Benson, president and CEO of Laidlaw.

"The transactions we are outlining today take advantage of that strength to further improve our financial position and our profitability over the next several years. Completion of our financing plans will significantly reduce the cost of our debt and put to work the cash we generated with the healthcare

sale," Benson added.

Here are the major elements of the recapitalization plan:

- A new \$600 million senior credit facility is being arranged, consisting of a \$300 million term loan maturing in 2010 and a \$300 million revolving credit line. Citigroup Global Markets Inc. and UBS Securities LLC will jointly lead and arrange the new debt facility.

- There will be a cash tender and solicitation offer for Laidlaw's \$404 million in 10.75 percent senior notes due 2011

- Greyhound Lines' \$150 million in 11.5 percent notes that are due in 2007 will be redeemed, as will Greyhound's \$5 million in 8.5 percent convertible debentures due in 2007.

The new revolving credit line is intended to provide seasonal and interim borrowings for Laidlaw and its subsidiaries, including Greyhound. Laidlaw intends to assume the position as Greyhound's senior lender.

Greyhound attacker sentenced

FRESNO, Calif. — The man who stabbed a Greyhound bus driver two years ago, causing a wreck on Interstate 5 north of Coalinga, Calif., is headed to prison.

Arturo Tapia pleaded no contest and agreed to 25 years to life in prison.

Tapia spent a year undergoing psychiatric testing before it was ruled he was competent to stand trial.

In September 2002, Tapia was on a Greyhound headed from Los Angeles to San Francisco, when for some reason he stabbed the driver, Abel Hernandez, with a pair of

scissors. The bus flipped over, killing two women passengers. Twenty-six other passengers were injured. Hernandez survived.

Relatives of one of the women killed in the crash asked the judge to have Tapia put to death. But Tapia reached a plea deal that ruled out the death penalty.

Defense attorney Ralph Torres said it was a tragic case involving a man who was severely mentally ill. "After months of treatment, he realized the pain and suffering he caused and freely admitted all counts and wants to be responsible," Torres said.

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Martz

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That a company that has been around since 1908 is still innovating and improving — when so many multigenerational companies falter — is noteworthy.

The business was founded by Frank Martz as the White Transit Co., a family-owned business that eventually grew into one of the premier motorcoach companies in the country, offering travel throughout the U.S. and Canada from operations in three states and Washington D.C.

Its beginning, though, was modest, starting out with runs between several tiny mining towns near the small community of Plymouth, Pa. Times were good then and — in 1912 — Martz expanded the service to cities throughout the northeastern and north-central parts of the state.

Wanting to expand further, Martz formed the Frank Martz Coach Co. in 1922 and began running buses between major cities — Detroit, Chicago and New York City among them — in several states in the Northeast and Midwest.

Always looking for opportunities, he took a shot at the fledging air travel industry in 1926, creating an airline in New York that served New York City, Elmira and Buffalo. While successful in its early years, the company hit hard times when the national economy went sour in the early 1930s. By 1933, Martz was forced to give up the business.

The loss, however, allowed Martz to concentrate on his bus operation and he quickly zeroed in on the need for a national transportation system. Working with other independent carriers, he helped form the National Trailways Bus System (now Trailways Transportation System) and its coast-to-coast service. His company, of course, was a key member of the new service and the only surviving member of the founding Trailways companies.

When Martz died in 1936, the business was turned over to his son, Frank Martz Jr., who had worked closely with his father and was ready for the challenge. He successfully grew the company for the next 28 years, until 1964, when he was killed in a helicopter accident. His death thrust Frank M. Henry, grandson of the founder, to the chairmanship, and he was ready, too.

Under his watch, the business expanded through a series of acquisitions of smaller coach companies and start-up operations in several states. Additionally, it opened bus sales and repair operations and formed a travel agency that offers air and cruise services.

Like a lot of companies, Martz hit some bumps in the late-1990s and early in this decade that tested its resilience and the business acumen of its executives.

“We spent a lot of time talking about costs and we looked at work that would be profitable work, not just revenue work,” said Henry. “We also looked at each location and each type of operation that they

performed, and did an in-depth study of the practicality of continuing or increasing the various modes of operations.”

The bottom-to-top look at the company led to the sale of its Orlando, Fla., business and much of the bus fleet that went with it, the closure of its Philadelphia office, and the merger of its Manassas, Va., tour-and-charter operation with its Fredricksburg, Va., operation. In addition, it made management changes and developed an extensive debt-reduction program.

Today, the company makeup includes Martz Trailways in Wilkes-Barre; Martz Poconos; Martz First Class Coach in Tampa Bay, Fla.; Martz/Goldline/Grayline of Washington D.C.; Martz of Fredricksburg; and Martz Travel of Wilkes-Barre.

While Henry likes to talk about the success of the business and the improvements it has made, he's particularly excited about the safety program it began developing three years ago. “We took a look at our safety program and decided we could do much better,” he said.

He brought in consultant Carmen Daecher of Harrisburg, Pa., who worked closely with the company's managers and safety team and helped develop a program that has reduced accidents by about two-thirds.

“With Frank Henry leading the charge, they have implemented a program geared toward making sure that the behavior of their drivers are safe behaviors,” noted Daecher.

The program includes four full weeks of training for all new drivers. The 165-hour course includes 48 hours in the classroom, 24 hours driving on an off-road course and 93 hours of road driving with an instructor.

Management also conducts quarterly safety meetings and drivers are road-tested



Frank Henry

annually to make sure they continue to perform well. Drivers involved in a preventable accident or who get a traffic ticket are observed for a time by an observer who either rides with them or follows them. And those that aren't driving up to company standards must attend classes.

“Driver safety is very big with Martz,” said Daecher, “You get a real big dose of it when you come in the door, as long as you stay with them you are going to continue to get training and the company is going to continue to see that you drive well.”

Other carriers, he said, would do well to follow the Martz lead.

Henry's dedication to safety and his efforts to improve his business earned him and the company the honors at Motorcoach Expo. In accepting the awards, Henry was quick to acknowledge the employees of Martz, as well as the contributions of top managers. “Pick people who are smarter than you are and you'll always come out on top,” he said.

“I believe Martz continues to be one of the premier operators in our business because they are not afraid to change and do things when they see that they are not doing something right,” observed Daecher.

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Paul F. Haffner has been named vice president, secretary and general counsel of **National Interstate Corp.** Haffner, 36, joins National Interstate from Great American Insurance Co. where he served as divisional assistant vice president and senior corporate counsel for the past five years. He began his legal career 11 years ago as an associate with a law firm owned by Great American. He holds an undergraduate degree from Dartmouth College and a law degree from the University of Cincinnati College of Law.

ABC Companies announced the retirement of *Mark Rosenthal*. ABC Cos. founder *Clancy Cornell* hired Rosenthal as a salesman in the California facility nearly 20 years ago. During his tenure with the company, Rosenthal was promoted to general manager in 1988 and regional vice president for the western region in 1993. Five years ago, Rosenthal was named vice president of pre-owned sales and was responsible for the sales and marketing of more than 1,200 used coaches acquired from New Jersey Transit. Most recently, Rosenthal was the account executive covering Northern California, Alaska, Washington, Oregon, and Idaho.

"When I hired Mark, he was running his own bus line and I could see the potential there for a great sales person, said ABC Chairman *Clancy Cornell*. ABC President & CEO *Ron Cornell* noted that Rosenthal has consistently been a top performer for the company.

Rosenthal will be doing consulting, and dividing his time between California and his home along the Pacific Coast in Mexico.

Motor Coach Industries announced that *Richard DeYoung*, Midwest regional sales manager, and *Greg Lukas*, East regional sales manager, have been promoted to regional vice presidents.

Theft charges are dismissed

SALT LAKE CITY — Theft charges against Salt Lake City-based motorcoach operator Steven Orson Lewis have been dismissed.

Lewis, 56, president of Lewis Bros. Stages, had been charged in May with theft by deception and failure to deliver a title, a second-degree felony. (See May 15 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

According to court documents, the charges stemmed from Lewis' alleged sale of a bus without paying off a lien.

But Lewis' attorney, Ken Brown, called it a business misunderstanding that has been cleared up and never should have been charged as a crime.

DeYoung, who has a seven-year career at MCI, continues to be responsible for the company's central U.S. territory. Additionally, he will be responsible for building MCI brand awareness. "After 24 years in the industry working for just two companies, I enjoy my work and the friendships I have with my customers," said DeYoung.

Lukas, who joined MCI 11 years ago, was named MCI's salesman of the year last year. He's responsible for new coach sales in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland, western New York, Washington, D.C., and Delaware. His promotion recognizes his success and dedication to the industry, notes *Pete Cotter*, MCI senior vice president of coach sales.



Mark Rosenthal



Richard DeYoung



Greg Lukas



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Preliminary Program Schedule

Wednesday, January 18, 2006

- ◆ State Association Summit (1:00PM - 5:00PM)
- ◆ Welcome Reception (6:00PM - 9:00PM)

Thursday, January 19, 2006

- ◆ UMA Active Member Meeting and Continental Breakfast (8:00AM)
- ◆ Maintenance Interchange (8:00AM - 4:00PM)
- ◆ Education Sessions (9:00AM - 4:15PM)
- ◆ Operator Luncheon
- ◆ Exhibit Hall Open – "Sneak Preview" (4:30PM - 7:30PM)

Friday, January 20, 2006

- ◆ Education Sessions (8:00AM - 10:30AM)
- ◆ Exhibit Hall Open (10:30AM - 5:30PM)
- ◆ Lunch on Exhibit Floor
- ◆ Vision Awards Banquet (6:30PM - 11:00PM)

Saturday, January 21, 2006

- ◆ Exhibit Hall Open (9:00AM - 12:00PM)
- ◆ Brunch on Exhibit Floor

Sunday, January 22, 2006

- ◆ 2nd Annual Ray Dupuis Memorial Golf Tournament (8:00AM)



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Scenic America sees growth

BRISTOW, Va. – When Scott and Sandy Merriman started Scenic America six years ago, they had “zero buses, no money and a lot of faith.”

Since then, the company has grown to a multi-million-dollar business with 42 employees and a fleet of 17 motorcoaches.

Scott Merriman began his industry career as a part-time school bus driver 26 years ago. Between 1979 and 1994, he held positions with several bus companies. In 1994, he was named vice president/general manager of Franklin Motorcoach, a unit of Martz Bus Lines. Sandy Merriman had also worked at Martz in the accounting and human resources departments.

After several attempts to acquire a bus company, the Merrimans decided to start their own operation.

The recent delivery of nine 2005 Van Hool C2045 coaches is part of the couple's strategic growth plan, and program to update their fleet. The company offers local and national charter services and tour planning, as well as receptive, convention and event planning services, and is in the process of expanding its tour division. Three more Van Hool C2045's are scheduled for delivery this month.

“Choosing ABC Companies for our motorcoach fleet needs was based upon three major areas: The quality and efficiency of their product - the Van Hool C2045; their willingness to take the time to help us analyze our motorcoach needs, and the customer and product support they have provided both pre- and post-delivery,” said Scott Merriman.

“No major equipment purchase is an easy accomplishment. However, the ownership and staff of ABC Companies, as well as their vendors, have made this a very pleasant and amicable experience and we are very pleased with our new business partnerships,” he added.

All 12 of Scenic America's new Van Hool's feature Caterpillar C13 engines, ZF AS-tronic transmissions with intarders, Amaya Brasil passenger seats, Isringhausen driver seats, enclosed parcel racks, Firestone tires, fog lights, restrooms equipped with Monogram flush-type recirculating toilets, REI A/V systems with DVD players, VCPs, radios and four monitors.

Two of the coaches scheduled for delivery this month will be equipped with Ricon wheelchair lifts.

For more information go to www.scenic-usa.com.



Tri-State gets new MCI Ds

Tri-State Travel has taken delivery of six new-look 40-foot MCI D4005 coaches. Tri-State's order was first announced when MCI unveiled the updated D model at Motorcoach Expo earlier this year.

Tri-State Travel prefers to use 40-foot coaches for many of its tour groups. “The D-series coaches have been the workhorse of our fleet,” said Rick Hillard, company vice president. Tri-State is partial to D models because they stay on the road and not in the shop, said Hillard.

“We're very pleased with the way the (updated D-model) coaches turned out. We particularly like the D4005. It serves our needs very well.”

Hillard said the most-requested coaches in the company fleet are its 35-foot, 36-passenger models, followed by its 40-foot D models. Tri-State, which has been buying MCI coaches for 35 years, operates 16 40-foot D-series coaches as part of a fleet that includes 41 MCIs.

MCI restyled its D-series models with input from operators and the assistance of BMW DesignworksUSA. The new-look D4005 and D4505 coaches have a curvier front end, flared headlights, LED directionals, a new exterior upper cap, frameless thermopane laminated side-sash windows, and a one-piece front bumper that curves toward the entrance door for a more stylish look.

New standard features on the D models include disc brakes, LED exterior lighting and a solid-state, plug-and-play multiplex system. The D4505 seats as many as 55 passengers; the D4005 can be specified for as few as 39 or as many as 47 passengers.

Tri-State's D4005s are equipped with Caterpillar C13 engines and ZF AS-tronic transmissions. They also feature Amaya seating for 47; an REI A/V system with DVD-VHS and six flat-screen monitors; Alcoa wheels; Goodyear tires; R.C.A. flooring; National 93B driver seats; enclosed overhead parcel racks, retractable passenger window shades and two card-table positions.

Rick Hillard, his cousin and company president, Mike Hillard, and Mike's brother, Mark, who heads maintenance, represent a second generation running the family business that was founded in 1940 by their fathers. A third generation has joined the company.

Celebrating its 65th anniversary in business this year, Tri-State is offering three special group tours led by family members. Rick's parents are leading a Cheyenne Frontier Days tour later this month. Daughter Angela Decker and her husband will take a group to New York City in August. And Mike Hillard is planning a Mackinaw Island bash.

Learn more about the company at www.tristatetravel.com.

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Silver State

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Southern California. Then it added a small full-service transportation service in Las Vegas and negotiated contracts with two busy tour companies that do a combination of short and long trips, several schools, a government agency and Harrah's Rincon.

“I have always felt that you have to diversify to be successful,” said Fiorini, adding that at the time of 9-11 many companies had too much of their business tied to the foreign travel market, which was one of the hardest-hit segments of the industry. “We didn't have everything in that one market.”

Silver State's relationship building begins with its customers and extends to everybody with whom the company comes in contact. “There is no better advertising than someone out there talking about your company in a positive way,” offered Fiorini.

Customers, of course, get the most attention. “When we talk to our customers, we try to make each of them feel like they are our No. 1 client, and we talk to all of them the same way we talk to Harrah's, which is our No. 1 client,” Fiorini said.

Harrah's does get extra attention, though. Fiorini, his drivers and other employees meet regularly with the casino

managers to make sure the bus company is providing Harrah's customers with the service the casino expects them to get.

Silver State also has developed close ties to other motorcoach companies, both locally and nationally, which opens the way for them to exchange business referrals. Among them is a limousine company that uses Silver State coaches for combination motorcoach and limousine service packages that it promotes.

It also has built strong relationships with its vendors, too, and is especially tight with ABC Companies, the exclusive U.S. distributor of the Van Hool coaches that fill the Silver State fleet. “If we have a problem with a coach, we get excellent service from ABC because of that relationship,” Fiorini emphasizes.

Down the road, Fiorini is looking to possibly grow by expanding its Las Vegas operation and adding a few more coaches to its fleet. “From that point, we'll just try to do what we do a little bit better and make it a little more profitable,” he said.

Meantime, it plans to hold tight to the gaming market as a possible hedge against any type of industry downturn. “I think that market will always be there, and I think most people believe that, too,” he suggested.



Haymarket Transportation Sterling, Va.

Haymarket Transportation Inc. has taken delivery of two of Van Hool's flagship T2145 coaches. The two new coaches are in addition to two T2145s that were delivered to Haymarket in late December.

With its principal business focused along the busy mid-Atlantic seaboard, Haymarket Transportation provides airport transfers, shuttle and charter services, and custom tour packages.

Its fleet ranges from luxury, late-model sedans and limousines, to 13-passenger conversion vans, mini and midsize buses, and 49- and 57-passenger coaches.

"With a customer base that consists primarily of high-ranking government officials and diplomats, we have a demand for high-end vehicles. The T2145 with its European styling and very attractive look fits that profile," said George Mouratidis, owner of Haymarket Transportation.

The company has been in business for 11 years and has done busi-

ness with ABC/Van Hool for 10 of those years. "The No. 1 reason for staying is ABC's service support. We have never been down and unable to transfer people. We've tried others but have found that the best support comes from Van Hool and ABC," added Mouratidis.

All four of the T2145s are equipped with Cummins ISM engines, Allison B500 transmissions and Jake Brakes. Other equipment includes 57-passenger American Seating, Isringhausen driver seats, enclosed parcel racks, Alcoa wheels, Goodyear tires, fog lights, REI A/V systems with five monitors, in-dash CD, and DVD Player with VCP. Additionally, all coaches are equipped with Intec back-up cameras with five-inch monitors.

The coaches have a strikingly simple exterior paint scheme that features large block letters in a deep forest green on a rich tan body color.

For more information go to www.haymarkettrans.com.



Discovery Coach Sheboygan, Wis.

Discovery Coach, a fourth-generation, family-owned charter and tour operator, has taken delivery of two Prevost 2005 H3-41 motorcoaches.

This is the first purchase of Prevost coaches by the 56-year-old company. The Discovery fleet includes eight other motorcoaches, plus school buses.

David Prigge, marketing director at Discovery, said that one of the factors leading to the purchase decision was Prevost's reputation for building dependable and consistently reliable coaches. Other factors that influenced the company decision to go with Prevost included customer appeal and satisfaction.

"We were looking for a 47- or 48-passenger vehicle to replace some older vehicles and were impressed by Prevost's curb appeal," said Prigge. Initial reaction from

customers to the new vehicles has been extremely positive, he added.

Discovery Coach spec'd its Prevosts with Detroit Diesel Series 60 engines, ZF AS-tronic transmissions, Jake Brakes, American passenger seats, Isringhausen driver seats, REI A/V systems with three monitors, Alcoa wheels, Michelin tires and Carrier A/C systems.

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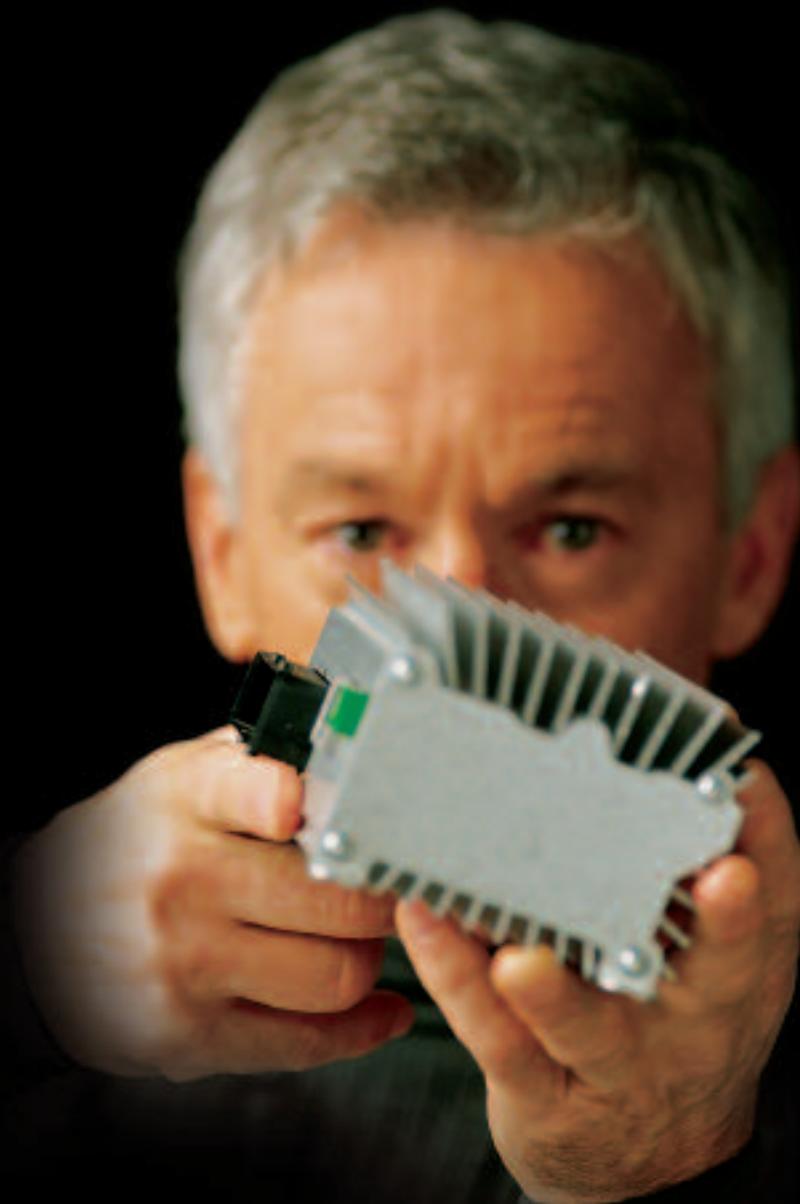


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