

Pre-owned coach sales strengthen, may get stronger

As recently as two years ago, sales lots across the U.S. and Canada overflowed with used motorcoaches as the market continued its adjustment to an oversupply of repossessions and trade-ins in the aftermath of 9/11.

No longer.

The market for pre-owned coaches has strengthened considerably and prices have stabilized or

risen as demand has climbed.

Coach industry sales executives attribute the turnaround to two principal factors:

- The industry has worked through the surplus that was created in the wake of 9/11.

- Trepidation about the 2007 reduced-emission diesel engines may have stimulated demand for used buses, especially for newer

models in good condition. That strong demand is seen as continuing well into next year.

ABC Companies, a major seller of pre-owned coaches, has processed a goodly share of the supply of the used buses that flooded the market after 9/11, especially during the past two years.

According to Bob Foley, ABC's chief operating officer, prior to

9/11, ABC account executives were accustomed to taking in a trade-in for about half of the new or late-model coach sales. After 9/11, however, they were being asked to take in several vehicles with every transaction as operators reduced their fleets in a strategy to stay afloat.

As companies went out of business or failed to make payments,

more used buses were added to the inventory of pre-owned vehicles on the market.

Foley says that while there were more used coaches available to sell in 2004 and 2005, his company's sales remained steady during those years, a trend that has continued.

John Morrison, vice president

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Former coach operator Mike Sodrel is in tough race to stay in Congress

WASHINGTON — Rep. Mike Sodrel, a Republican congressman from Indiana and former operator of a well-known motorcoach company, is facing an uphill battle to retain the House seat he snatched from Democrat Baron Hill two years ago by a scant 1,500 votes.

It's the third straight go-around for these two, and both Republicans and Democrats are targeting the race for special attention.

At least one political observer says there is a general feeling among the experts that "it's Hill's (race) to lose."

The contest is important because a 15-seat swing would give Democrats the majority in the

U.S. House of Representatives.

Sodrel, who is believed to be the only member of Congress to hold a CDL, established a bus company 30 years ago with three 1949 GMC transit buses and five employees and named it The Free Enterprise System.

In 1987, he purchased Sodrel Truck Lines from his family, giving him a combined 500-person operation with trucks and motorcoaches that are familiar sights on highways throughout the Midwest.

But Sodrel's success in politics could be short lived.

Brian Vargus, political science professor at Indiana University, says if any of the contested con-



Republican Mike Sodrel of Indiana is running for the third time against Democrat Baron Hill.

gressional seats along the Ohio River — and that includes districts in Indiana, Kentucky and Ohio —

are likely to change hands this year, Hill is the one expected to prevail.

Though Indiana is the 12th-most Republican state in the

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Nursing home evacuation plans move slowly in SE states

RICHMOND, Va. — Virginia is moving ahead of other hurricane-vulnerable states with plans to line up enough motorcoaches to evacuate its nursing homes, while other states in the Southeast appear to be stuck in neutral.

Linda Morris, executive director of state motorcoach associations in Virginia, North Carolina,

South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama and Louisiana, says only Virginia is making progress.

"Each of my state associations has an emergency preparedness committee and all are in the process of working with state officials on how best to respond, given the situation," said Morris.

"The state that has done the

most is Virginia. They've had three meetings and we're hoping that — to some degree — they will establish some type of model or example that other states can use."

In Virginia, Morris explains, the association has agreed to be the initial contact point for the state and to broadcast emergency information to its members.

"The association's committee has been more aggressive in Virginia," she noted.

In South Carolina, on the other hand, nothing has changed since early this summer when the state Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC), which licenses nursing homes, tried to negotiate a deal with the Motor-

coach Association of South Carolina.

Morris said the plan was flawed from the beginning.

"The nursing homes cannot commit to make an arrangement until the governor issues a state of emergency," she said. On the other hand, motorcoach owners "can't

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Blue Bird being bought by NY investment firm

FORT VALLEY, Ga. — Blue Bird Corporation, North America's most diversified bus manufacturer and one of its most financially challenged, is getting a new owner and new financial stability.

An affiliate of Cerberus Capital Management, a large New York-based investment company, is buying Blue Bird from a group of banks. The acquisition is the latest step in Cerberus' strategy to become a U.S. bus-manufacturing powerhouse.

In a period of a few months, Cerberus has made three significant bus industry acquisitions. In February, it bought North American Bus Industries (NABI), the Alabama-based maker of 40- and 60-foot transit, commuter and shuttle buses.

Then, last month, it was announced that NABI (commonly pronounced nab-ee) had purchased Optima Bus Corp. of Park City, Kan. (a suburb of Wichita). Optima makes stylish 30- and 35-foot transit and shuttle buses and the American Heritage Streetcar, a

trolley bus.

Now, Cerberus is buying Blue Bird, a \$700 million company that is best known for its school buses but also makes commercial and transit buses, plus motorcoaches and high-end Wanderlodge RVs.

Terms have not been disclosed for any of the acquisitions. The Blue Bird purchase is expected to close this month.

Jeffrey Bust, president and chief executive of Blue Bird, said the acquisition by Cerberus "is a significant step forward, ensuring Blue Bird will remain one of the world's leading school and commercial bus manufacturers. The acquisition also provides financial stability for our distributors, suppliers and employees."

Peter Duda, a spokesman for Cerberus, said the investment company sees Blue Bird "as a great brand that has demonstrated significant improvement over the last three years. Cerberus believes it can provide the capital structure Blue Bird needs for continued growth and increased profitability."



Blue Bird CEO Jeffrey Bust

Cerberus owns control or significant stakes in Air Canada, Fila sports wear, the Alamo/National car-rental combine, Formica, Mervyn's and other firms. It also is one of Burger King's largest franchise holders.

In April, Cerberus reached an agreement to acquire 51 percent of General Motors Acceptance Corp., the financing arm of General Motors Corp.

The company says it is one of the largest private investment firms in the world, with \$45 billion in holdings. Its Web address is www.cerberuscapital.com.

The company was formed 14 years ago.

Mike McCurdy, Blue Bird human resources director, said the

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Megabus adds city, sees steady growth

CHICAGO — Coach USA has made the first expansion to its fledgling Megabus service, a strong sign the low-fare, Internet-driven express bus service is taking hold.

The company said it began daily service between Chicago and Toledo, Ohio, on Sept. 12.

"We have been selling tickets since July and they are going very well," said Dale Moser, president and chief operating officer. "They're trending very nicely."

The company introduced Megabus in the Midwest in April, with multiple daily roundtrip runs from its base in Chicago to Cincinnati, Cleveland, Detroit, Indianapolis, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, St. Louis and Columbus, Ohio, and daily runs between Indianapolis and Cincinnati and Indianapolis and Columbus.

Tickets are only sold on the Internet and generally range from \$8 to \$39. A limited number of seats — three or four — are available on each run for \$1 to people who book them well in advance of their travel date.

Coach USA chose Toledo for the first expansion because of numerous requests from people living in the area and because the city is on its Chicago and Cleveland run, which made it easy to merge the stop into the route without disrupting the existing service. "We just moved from a rest stop just outside of Toledo to inside the city," Moser said.

Although the new service to Toledo marks Coach USA's first expansion of Megabus, it is not the first adjustment it has made to the service. The company early on dropped Columbus from the cities it serves because of a lack of ridership.

Elsewhere, Megabus, which was modeled after a successful express service that Coach USA parent Stagecoach Group introduced in the United Kingdom more than three years ago, is doing very well, according to Moser.

He said the passenger count already has topped 90,000 and the number of visitors to the company's

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THE DOCKET

2007 deadline is altered for passport requirement

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Homeland Security and U.S. Department of State have delayed by a week the requirement that air and sea travelers in the Western Hemisphere, including U.S. residents, have passports beginning next year.

Under the change, the requirement that citizens of the United States, Canada, Mexico and Bermuda must have a passport for all air travel and most commercial sea travel within the Western Hemisphere will take effect Jan. 8.

This is a switch from the previously scheduled date of Jan. 1. The change is being made to accommodate late 2006–early 2007 holiday travel.

The rules apply to all cruise-ship passengers, even those taking three-day trips. Previously, many itineraries required that the passenger have only a driver's license and birth certificate.

Some travel experts are pre-

dicting delays at passport offices in the weeks leading up to Jan. 8.

Meanwhile, Jan. 1, 2008, remains the deadline for all Western Hemisphere travelers, including those crossing borders by land, to have passports.

While next year's air- and sea-travel requirement is expected to impact the motorcoach tour and charter industry, the 2008 requirement is expected to have a huge impact on many bus operators.

In fact, publicity about the passport requirement already appears to be having an impact on cross-border ground traffic.

Niagara Parks Commission General Manager John Kernahan told an upstate New York newspaper that this year's tourist season was adversely affected by unwarranted concerns over the proposed passport rules.

Kernahan said widespread confusion had surfaced because people think the new rules are already in place.

Yosemite road open to buses

CHINESE CAMP, Calif. — Forty-five foot motorcoaches are again being allowed to use a main road leading into Yosemite National Park, the California Bus Association reports.

Emergency widening of State Route 120 has been completed along a stretch known as New Priest Grade, which is east of where State Routes 49 and 120 intersect near Groveland, Calif.

Several sections of the road were widened, allowing access to the park by longer vehicles, including 45-foot buses.

The roadwork was needed because of limitations placed on State Route 140 as a result of rockslides. While State Route 140 remains open, it will not accommodate 45-foot vehicles.

California has more than 215 roadways that prohibit 45-foot coaches. The California Department of Transportation maintains a helpful Web site listing all restricted roads and their locations. Go to www.dot.ca.gov/hq/traffops/trucks.bus-mh/.

Bush picks Mary Peters for top USDOT position

WASHINGTON — President Bush has picked an outspoken advocate of using tolls to help pay for new highways to be the next secretary of the U.S. Department of Transportation.

Bush nominated Mary E. Peters, who spent nearly four years as head of the Federal Highway Administration before leaving just over a year ago.

Victor Parra, president and CEO of the United Motorcoach Association, said Peters' selection "is a great choice!"

When Peters left Washington it was a foregone conclusion she would run for governor of Arizona as a Republican. However, she immediately ran into an Arizona constitutional provision that requires candidates to be a state "citizen" five years before an election and the threat of a lawsuit if she ran. Early polls indicated only modest support for her candidacy.

Within a matter of months she decided not to make the run, saying that while she believed she

would have been a strong candidate, and was eligible to run despite having lived in Virginia, a court test of the issue would have been a distraction from the race.



Mary Peters

Since November, Peters has been national director for transportation policy and consulting in the Phoenix office of the Omaha-based architectural, engineering and consulting firm HDR Inc.

In a recent interview with a wire service, Peters said the federal highway program will run out of money by decade's end without substantial changes in the way highways are funded.

"You just can't depend on the federal government to bring the money in that was around when the interstate system was first built," Peters said.

During her years at the Federal Highway Administration she attempted to focus national attention on expanding the private sector's role in financing, building, operating and maintaining highways and bridges.

According to the USDOT Web site, she encouraged innovation in all phases of highway and bridge delivery, and worked to remove legal and regulatory obstacles to surface transportation efficiency and creativity.

Peters also has been a strong advocate of programs aimed at making highways safer. Among other things, she promoted enhanced guardrail, rumble strip and crash-prevention technologies, encouraged community-based pedestrian safety programs, and urged states to develop comprehensive safety strategies. She also led a national campaign to improve safety in highway work zones.

Peters has a reputation as being an amiable but no-nonsense administrator.

A fourth generation Arizonan, Peters was director of the Arizona Department of Transportation when Bush nominated her to be FHWA administrator. She spent three years directing the A-DOT, where she worked her way up through the ranks during a 16-year career.

If confirmed by the Senate, Peters will succeed Norman Mineta, who quit in July.

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Delaware begins cracking down on bus, truck idling

DOVER, Del. — State environmental police have begun enforcing tough anti-idling regulations that were adopted more than a year ago.

The Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control approved the idling restrictions in April of last year, and have spent the past 17 months

working with industry groups, school districts and others to build awareness of the rules and to seek cooperation and compliance.

Starting this month, however, bus and big-rig drivers will pay a hefty price for violating the air quality regulations.

Under the rules, drivers of vehicles weighing 8,500 pounds and

more face fines of \$50 to \$500 for first offenses if caught idling for longer than the rules permit, with some exceptions. Penalties for subsequent offenses can range from \$500 to \$1,500.

The rules have a number of exceptions for cold weather and for buses picking up passengers. Bus drivers can idle for up to five min-

utes during pickups. A 15-minute window is allowed when weather is below freezing and limits are waived when temperatures dip below minus-10 degrees Fahrenheit.

Other exemptions include:

- Stops caused by traffic conditions beyond a driver's control.
- Complying with vehicle manufacturer recommendations

for warm-up.

- When the vehicle is being repaired.

- Idling to verify the vehicle is in safe operating condition.

- When passengers are on board.

Delaware maintains a 24-hour, toll-free *Environmental Complaint Line* where residents can call to complain about idling vehicles.

Transits seek charter firms

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

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

Elbert County, Ga. Deadline: Sept. 21, 2006. Write to: Rebecca Stephens, Manager, Elbert Area Transit, P.O. Box 493, Elberton, GA 30635. Phone: (706) 283-2034.

Monroe County, Ohio. Deadline: Sept. 22, 2006. Write to: Denise Potts, Transit Coordinator, Monroe County, 118 Home Ave./P.O. Box 507, Woodsfield, OH 43793. Phone: (740) 472-2531.

Danville, Ill. Deadline: Sept. 29, 2006. Write to: Richard L. Brazda, Director of Public Transportation, Danville Mass Transit, 101 N. Jackson St., Danville, IL 61832. Phone: (217) 431-0653.

Greater Bridgeport, Conn. Deadline: Oct. 2, 2006. Write to: Greater Bridgeport Transit Authority, Office of Planning and Service Development, One Cross St., Bridgeport, CT 06610. Phone: (203) 366-7070.

Pennsylvania adopts strict driving rules

HARRISBURG, Pa. — New legislation has gone into effect in Pennsylvania, under which drivers involved in an accident in so-called emergency response areas would automatically lose their driver's license for 90 days.

The legislation, commonly known as a steer-clear law, requires drivers to maintain speeds that are "reasonable or prudent under the conditions" when passing areas where emergency responders are at work.

Additionally, the state has doubled fines related to reckless driving, passing, stopping, following too closely and driving while under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

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Evacuation

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just turn down business thinking a storm might come. All of our members have let state officials know they are ready to help, but there is no formal arrangement yet. DHEC wanted to contract with the association. But I do not dispatch coaches. They have to deal with

independent operators, who will do whatever they can to help.”

Morris said the state agency “didn’t have a clue what they were stepping into.”

Liability concerns and the association’s inability to order bus operators to agree to an evacuation deal make the situation difficult. A sticking point is precisely when motorcoaches would be pulled

from regular business to help with evacuations, Morris said.

Many operators already have independent agreements with nursing homes, but there is concern that some bus companies might be spread too thin if several facilities need emergency evacuations at the same time.

“I don’t think any operators are committed beyond their capacity,”

Morris said. “The way I look at it, when we know a hurricane is on the way there has to be some way for nursing homes or other agencies that need evacuations to have operators on standby, but there are no funds for that.”

Morris said she has heard that Texas officials are working on a plan that would pay bus operators to be on standby when a storm is a

certain number of hours away. “You don’t know exactly where a hurricane is going to go, but it’s better to be safe than sorry.”

Gwen Elmore, president of the Virginia Motorcoach Association and part owner of Fun Tours Inc., in Virginia Beach, said communication is the key to putting an evacuation plan together.

At a brainstorming session in November, tour operators in the Southeast expressed concern about being solicited for assistance by third parties and the difficulty some had in getting paid after Hurricane Katrina.

“That sparked the need for us to be proactive,” Elmore said. “We appointed an emergency preparedness committee and established contact with the Virginia Emergency Operations Center in Richmond. We’ve had three meetings with them. We have a game plan, if we are needed, that will kick in immediately.”

In an emergency, the association will dispatch two individuals to act as liaisons in the state command center in Richmond. “State police won’t have to figure out who’s close to what,” Elmore said. “Our liaisons will know.”

One on-going and widespread concern is the challenge of loading and unloading seriously disabled residents of nursing homes. Drivers are prepared to lift up to 100 pounds, but a motorized wheelchair might weigh 400 pounds, said Elmore.

Part of the Virginia plan is to provide state officials with a complete list of available coaches and how many are wheelchair-lift equipped.

Elaine Johnson, president of the Motorcoach Association of South Carolina, said officials need to understand that motorcoaches are not ambulances.

“We are able to take retirees, but we are not equipped to handle invalids,” said Johnson. “We can’t be put in a position of picking and choosing who we take. We suggested establishing a state Web site so as soon as a hurricane is out there all the information on willing and able operators will be posted, but there is still no Web site.

“It’s sad that things are demanded but there are no guidelines. Who rides in a bus? Who needs an ambulance?” said Johnson.

“We need a staging process to work from and with. If they don’t call us into action when the hurricane is only eight to ten hours out, that’s not emergency preparedness. We need the powers that be to step up to the plate and give us a staging area, a venue for getting orders.”



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Sodrel

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nation, *Congressional Quarterly* calls the Hill-Sodrel race a toss-up.

Vargus says Sodrel did not endear himself to constituents in southern Indiana's 9th district, by holding major fundraisers with President and Laura Bush in Indianapolis, which is not in the district. By the same token, former President Bill Clinton campaigned for Hill — also in Indianapolis.

Kim Savage, Sodrel's campaign manager, says the primary issues in the race are taxes, immigration and energy. Sodrel voted to extend Bush administration tax cuts, including those on capital gains and supports repeal of estate taxes.

"A big issue for us is immigration," Savage says. "Mike is for a strong border security bill with no amnesty for illegal immigrants. He favors controlling the border with a combination of technology, boots on the ground and fences."

Asked why illegal immigration is a big issue in Indiana, Savage responds by saying "it's a big issue everywhere. Jobs are going to illegals who are breaking the law, and our taxes are paying for social services for people who are here illegally. Indiana people want the laws enforced."

Regarding energy, says Savage, greater use of ethanol and biodiesel would help reduce U.S. dependence on foreign oil, with Indiana corn and soybeans a factor. Thirteen new ethanol plants in Indiana are in various stages of planning or construction, he says.

"Mike voted for the energy bill but a lot of people don't want to drill anywhere," Savage says. As the former owner of a bus and truck company, Sodrel "clearly

understands the issue," says Savage.

Abby Curran, a spokeswoman for Hill, agrees that energy is a big issue in Indiana. "A lot of gas prices are over \$3 a gallon with no relief in sight," she says, adding that Hill "opposes tax breaks to big oil companies at the expense of working Americans — the same oil companies that are reporting record profits."

Likewise, Hill sees Indiana's abundance of corn as a factor in producing alternative energy. But when it comes to drilling for oil in sensitive areas of Alaska, Curran says, "Hill opposes drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge."

Immigration is a jobs issue, Curran says, and if someone breaks the law they should face the full penalties. Hill favors a crack-down on employers who hire illegal immigrants.

An unknown factor is the possible impact of President Bush's declining popularity and a growing uneasiness over the war in Iraq. Vargus of Indiana University observes that the state "is strong on patriotism, but there is considerable concern about what's going on in Iraq, especially with the long deployment of Indiana National Guard troops."

Savage, Sodrel's campaign manager, downplays Iraq as an issue, pointing out that Hill voted for the war when he was in Congress.

"This is not an area where you hear a lot of people are upset," Savage says. "It was the right thing to do and we want to win. Mike has focused on providing the troops with the tools they need."

Sodrel, a former member of Army National Guard's 1st Battalion, 151st Mechanized Infantry, traveled to Iraq and Afghanistan and visited with members of his

old unit while it was stationed there, Savage says.

Hill did vote for the war, but, "Baron now believes the war was a mistake," says Curran. "He stands by his decision that was based on faulty information at the time and believes it was miserably handled by the Bush administration. He supports the troops. However, we owe it to the Iraqi people to achieve political stability, or if we get to a point that it's never going to happen then it's time to initiate troop redeployment."

In campaign appearances, Hill, who ran a small business in Seymour, Ind., before he was elected to Congress in 1998, charges that Sodrel has voted against the interests of small business owners by refusing to increase funding for the Small Business Administration's 7(a) loan program.

Savage calls the anti-small business charge nonsense, saying Sodrel has voted 100 percent of the time for issues supported by the National Federation of Independent Business. Even so, Professor Vargus says Sodrel "has been portrayed as a millionaire candidate with considerable wealth."

Vargus expects more than \$3 million to be spent on the race, which he says will be extremely close. The political scientist says four counties — Monroe, Clark, Floyd and Dearborn — account for the majority of votes in the district.

"The general consensus is if anybody takes three of the four counties, he'll win. Hill did well in Monroe and Floyd counties the last time, but President Bush carried the district by a substantial margin.

"Ultimately, three things will determine the outcome — turnout, turnout and turnout."

Accident in New York? Report it, but carefully

An attorney for a law firm that specializes in defending commercial vehicle operators in accident cases says bus and truck companies running in New York should be aware of state reporting requirements when there is an accident but should be careful in complying with the rules.

When a crash happens in New York and the incident involves a fatality, personal injury or property damage of more than \$1,000, the accident must be reported within 10 days to the New York State Department of Motor Vehicles, says Diane Carvell of the firm of Rawle & Henderson in Philadelphia.

The accident is to be reported using a MV-104 form that's available from the New York State Department of Motor Vehicles. Failing to report the accident is a misdemeanor, punishable by up to a year in jail.

A driver's license also may be suspended until an MV-104 is filed.

If the driver of the vehicle is physically unable to prepare the report, the owner of the vehicle is required to file the report within 10 days of learning the facts of the accident.

The reporting requirement applies whether the driver or company is based in New York or not.

"There are times when the property damage appears minor and motorists do not appear to be injured," Carvell noted. "Some time after the accident, however, counsel for the other parties may notify you of a claim for personal injuries. With or without the writ-

ten notice, a civil lawsuit may be subsequently filed claiming personal injuries.

"If the MV-104 form has not been previously filed, we recommend that the form be completed and filed as soon as possible."

One of the requirements of completing the MV-104 form is to give a written description of how the accident happened.

"Be careful!" cautions Carvell. "Under New York law, this statement will constitute an admission by the driver which is discoverable in a civil lawsuit. Many plaintiffs' attorneys contact the Department of Motor Vehicles and request accident reports. They also request such forms in the course of discovery.

"If the employer fills out the form and has the driver sign it, the driver adopts all of the statements on the form as his or her own. Therefore, it is important that the driver's written description of the accident be both truthful and consistent with all statements previously made about the accident.

"Statements made early will form the basis of the driver's defense in a civil lawsuit even if the action is not instituted until three years after the accident. Therefore, it is vital that the driver carefully review the MV-104 and make sure its contents are accurate," asserts Carvell.

"We recommend seeking advice from counsel before completing the form. It ensures that the defense of a civil lawsuit is established early and in the best interest of the driver and the bus or truck operator."

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Expo 2007 grabs early momentum

NEW ORLEANS — Although Motorcoach Expo 2007 is still four months away, momentum for the show is clearly building, according to two key indicators.

Tara Sheehan, membership and marketing manager at the United Motorcoach Association, which produces the annual event, reports that early registrations are running ahead of the last three Expos, including Expo 2005 in Las Vegas and this year's Expo in

Tampa, Fla.

"We just had to increase our room block to add 250 more rooms to accommodate the increase in demand," said Sheehan. "This is great."

Simultaneously, Mark Miller of Convention Management Group, which coordinates the Expo exhibit space for UMA, says the total sold square footage for Expo 2007 exceeds the total for the final numbers at the 2006 show in Tampa.

"We have the Big Mo going with both exhibit sales and registration," said Miller.

The motorcoach industry's most-important trade event will be Jan. 16-21 at the Morial Convention Center and other sites in New Orleans. The host hotel is the New Orleans Marriott on famed Canal Street, near Harrah's Casino and the French Quarter.

To register or for more information, go to www.motorcoach-expo.com.

Going to Expo? Wanna take a bus?

NEW ORLEANS — Would you be interested in journeying to Motorcoach Expo 2007 via the new-fashioned way — by bus?

The United Motorcoach Association is putting out feelers to gauge interest in developing a small caravan of coaches from different parts of the country traveling to Expo and picking up attendees along the route.

For example, a coach might start in Chicago, taking Interstate

55 south and make stops along the way in Springfield, Ill.; St. Louis; Memphis; Jackson, Miss., and other points.

Another coach might start in the New York-New Jersey area and take Interstates 78, 81, 75 and 59 to New Orleans with dozens of possible stops en route.

A coach also could come up I-75 or I-95 in Florida, making stops all along the way before heading west on I-10.

Or, a coach could leave Indianapolis on I-65, making stops in Louisville, Bowling Green, Nashville, Birmingham and Montgomery. Lots of other routes are possible, of course.

If you are interested in exploring the idea, contact Eric Morales or Amy Stalknecht at the United Motorcoach Association. Phone: (800) 424-8262 or e-mail emorales@uma.org or astalknecht@uma.org. Do it soon.

Michael Neustadt of Conn. is appointed UMA director

ALEXANDRIA, Va. — A long-time member of the United Motorcoach Association, Michael Neustadt, has been appointed to the organization's board of directors.

Neustadt, who is president of Coach Tours in Brookfield, Conn., fills the unexpired term of Bob Brisman of West Point Trailways in Vails Gate, N.Y. Brisman resigned from the board because of a change in professional responsibilities.

Neustadt has been president and owner of Coach Tours for 20 years. Before buying an interest in the company, he was director of operations for a Los Angeles-based

motorcoach and tour operator for five years.

His travel industry career began while he was in college in the 1960s, working at a hotel. After college, he spent the next 20 years in the hotel, airline and finally motorcoach industries.

He has served for three years on the board of the National Tour Association and chairman of its government and industry relations committee. He has worked to foster stronger ties between NTA and UMA. Neustadt has worked on such important industry issues as coach parking in New York City.

His term will expire in 2008.

Firestone accepts UMA/Wright cards

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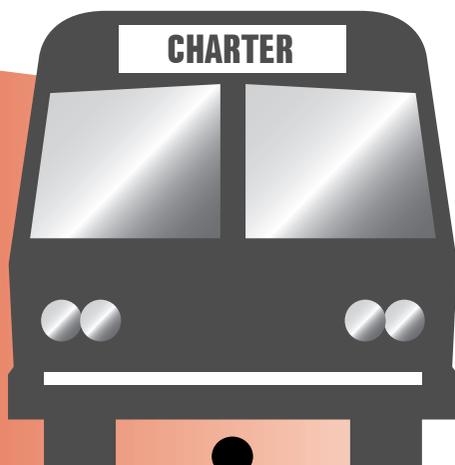
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Truckers hire older drivers

GREEN BAY, Wis. — Borrowing a page from the motorcoach industry, trucking companies have begun aggressively recruiting older drivers, the *Wall Street Journal* reports.

The recruiting effort is in response to ongoing truck driver shortages, and includes many husband and wife teams.

The trend does not bode well for coach companies, of course, because it may mean more competition for potential drivers.

Green Bay-based trucking giant Schneider National searches for potential long-haul drivers aged 50 and over through the American Association of Retired

Persons, and puts them through driving school.

About 3,000 of Schneider's 15,000 independent contractors and drivers are "older" people, the *Journal* noted.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the number of service and truck drivers aged 55 or older has increased 19 percent, to 616,000, since 2000, the *Journal* said.

In February, the American Trucking Associations announced its participation in the Alliance for an Experienced Workforce program, an initiative led by AARP to recruit workers aged 50 and up.

ZF upgrades to 12 speeds for 2007

VERNON HILLS, Ill. — ZF Sales and Service North America has announced that ZF's automatic transmission for motorcoaches is being upgraded for 2007 to both improve fuel economy and take-off acceleration.

The ZF-AS Tronic coach transmission is going to 12 speeds, helping improve the performance of the '07 reduced-emissions diesel engines.

"Up from 10-speeds, the '07 AS Tronic will include features to better communicate with the new line of engines, as well as further reduce maintenance," said company sales manager Rick Manna.

The two additional speeds will permit the use of a 3.21:1 rear-axle ratio, increasing fuel economy while providing improved performance at start-up and low-speeds, Manna noted.

To better communicate with the '07 engines, ZF has developed a new shift-control module, known as the GS3.3. The GS3.3 module contains more memory, a faster processor and new software specifically tailored for the new engines.

Along with the new shift module will be an enhanced clutch fork and release bearing system with lifetime lubrication, further reducing the required maintenance for

the AS Tronic, Manna said.

The '07 transmission will continue to carry the same 185,000 mile/two-year oil change interval, using three gallons of synthetic gear lube (five gallons with retarder). The non-retarder version still requires no cooling or paper filters.

Motor Coach Industries, Prevost Car and Van Hool will be offering the latest version AS Tronic on their coaches equipped with '07 engines.

The three motorcoach builders will offer the 10-speed AS Tronic until they begin delivering coaches with the 2007 EPA-compliant engines.

First-time attendees take prizes at Tennessee rodeo

BUCHANAN, Tenn. — The two top winners at this year's Tennessee Motor Coach Association Driver and Mechanic Rodeo were first-time attendees at the event held here last month at the Paris Landing State Park.

Twenty-two drivers and mechanics from across Tennessee, as well as from Kentucky and Mississippi, competed in the two-day event.

Drivers were tested on their motorcoach handling skills, plus their knowledge of federal safety rules and their ability to deal with passengers. The mechanics were tested on mechanical knowledge, including parts recognition and coach inspections.

This year's winner in the driver

category was Richard Gibson of Komfort Koaches in Owensboro, Ky. Kevin Creasy of Coach USA-Memphis took second place; Lawrence Defreese of Greene Coach came in third; Toby Tyler with Blue Grass Tours was fourth, and Ronnie Holt with Greene Coach came in fifth.

In the mechanic competition, Kenneth Hickey with Barkley Travel Service in New Albany, Miss., took first place. Chad Schumacher with Gray Line Nashville was second; Jeff Jones of Wise Coaches came in third, and Billy Berry with Callahan Bus Lines took fourth place.

First place winners received \$500, second \$250, third \$100, fourth \$50 and fifth \$25.

Megabus

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Web site, *megabus.com*, has just about reached 1 million.

"So far we are doing very well because we have been able to get people out of their cars," he said. "We knew we could do that and we are very pleased that we did."

A study conducted by Coach USA's research department in June showed that about 45 percent of 1,600 passengers who were questioned said they previously traveled by car. In addition, 24 percent said they had been train riders, 17 percent said they used another bus service and 13 percent said they flew.

Moser said two cities — Detroit and Minneapolis — have emerged as the most popular runs from Chicago.

Ironically, those are the same runs that Greyhound Lines, the chief competitor of Coach USA in the area, selected to expand its "hot seats" bargain fares, which are reduced prices for tickets purchased over the Internet. The company has offered the program in the

northeast for some time and only recently introduced it in Chicago.

Greyhound's "hot seat" fares for trips from Chicago to Detroit or Minneapolis are \$25. That compares with Coach USA's Megabus fares of \$20 to Detroit and \$32 to Minneapolis.

The expansion of its special Internet sales program by Greyhound was not necessarily in response to the success Megabus is having on the two busy routes, but more of a move to address the positive reaction customers have had to the "hot seat" program on the East Coast, said Greyhound spokeswoman Anna Folmsbee. "Chicago is one of our busiest service locations," she noted.

Coach America, which serves several states — California and Florida — where such a service might be successful would not say if it is looking into starting a similar operation. "We think it is an interesting concept and a legitimate passenger offering," said Coach America spokeswoman Liz Greene.

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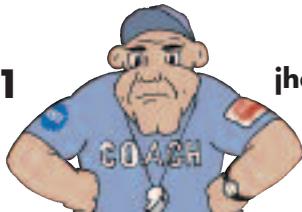
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It's back to the future at Penn. bus museum

HERSHEY, Pa. — A lovingly restored 65-year-old truck — that looks more like a motorcoach — will be on display for about a week later this month at the Museum of Bus Transportation here.

The vehicle is one of the famed Futurliners produced by General Motors before World War II to provide Americans with a glimpse into the future. The Futurliners transported dioramas and exhibits of “futuristic” items.

The Futurliner goes on display Wed., Sept. 27, and will remain available for viewing through Monday, Oct. 2. The display is a joint project of the Antique Automobile Club of America Museum, which shares facilities with the Museum of Bus Transportation.

The Futurliner to be displayed

is No. 10 of 12 built by GM for its Parade of Progress show that toured the U.S. prior to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 and again in the early 1950s.

In its day, the Futurliner was considered massive. And, up close, its size still impresses. It is 33-feet long, 8-feet wide, nearly 12-feet tall and has a 248-inch wheelbase. Among its unusual features are dual front wheels, with each wheel having its own set of brakes.

Despite the all-wheel braking, Futurliners were notorious for being difficult to stop, and they had constant problems with power steering pumps, presumably because of the tremendous force needed to turn the dual-front wheels.

Peter Pan Trailways of Springfield, Mass., has a restored Futur-



liner it uses for promotions. The Peter Pan Futurliner is painted Peter Pan green and has been upgraded to make it more reliable and easier to maintain.

The Futurliner to be displayed at the Museum of Bus Transportation has been restored as much as possible to original early-1950s condition, including the bright-red and

white GM livery. The vehicle is on loan from the National Automotive and Truck Museum in Auburn, Ind.

Earlier this year, a restored Futurliner sold for \$4 million at an auto auction in Scottsdale, Ariz.

Currently, through early October, the Antique Automobile Club Museum has a display of American “muscle cars” from 1964-72.

Registrations for dot travel reach 20,000+

LONDON — The number of .travel domain-name registrations has reached 20,000 worldwide, a British on-line travel industry information reports.

Travolution quoted .travel founder Ron Andruff as saying that in the 14 months since registrations began, 20,000 names have been reserved. Roughly half the names have been registered by U.S. and Canada companies and organizations, with the remainder outside North America.

Meanwhile, Andruff has announced he is stepping down from day-to-day management of Tralliance, the company selling .travel registrations, to work on its global business development.

Edward Cespedes, the president of Tralliance parent company, *TheGlobe.com*, is replacing Andruff.

The United Motorcoach Association, the National Tour Association and the American Bus Association are assisting their members signing up for a .travel domain name.

Wichita-based operator expands facilities in Oklahoma City

OKLAHOMA CITY — Village Charters Inc. is building an 8,500-square-foot office and maintenance facility to expand its Oklahoma City operation.

The Wichita, Kan.-based tour

and charter operator bought five acres on the northeast corner of Interstate 35 and N.E. 50th Street, roughly two miles south of its present Oklahoma City office, for the new facility. The site is just east of

Remington Park Racetrack.

“Quite frankly, we’ve outgrown our current facility,” said company co-owner Jeff Arensdorf. “Our new facility will give our customers much more parking and we’ll be

able to service our motorcoaches more easily.”

The Oklahoma City office has nine employees and the company plans to hire three more before the new facility opens in April.

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Haugslund is retiring, Greyhound promotes 4 executives

DALLAS — One of the bus industry's best-known and longest-serving top executives, Jack Haugslund, has announced he is retiring early next year.

For the past 20 years, Haugslund has been a senior executive at Greyhound Lines, serving currently as executive vice president and chief operating officer.

Haugslund joined Greyhound 40 years ago, starting his company career as a driver while attending the University of Wisconsin.

"In the 17 years I have been in the transportation business, I have never worked with anybody as dedicated, loyal and passionate as Jack," said Steve Gorman, Greyhound's president and CEO. "His

contributions and accomplishments have earned him great respect and admiration in the travel industry."

Succeeding Haugslund will be Dave Leach, who as senior vice president is the top executive of Greyhound Canada. He will have the new title of chief operating officer. Leach is moving from Ontario to Dallas, where Greyhound is headquartered.

Leach has 20 years experience

in the Canadian private intercity bus industry and will work with Haugslund until January as part of the transition.

"Dave has delivered substantial value to the company and its long-term competitive position. His unrivaled understanding of the industry's challenges and opportunities will continue to benefit the Greyhound companies going forward," said Gorman.

Greyhound also announced three other senior executive promotions:

- Cheryl Farmer, senior vice president of finance and treasurer, has been promoted to chief financial officer.

- Toby Purdy, senior vice president of marketing, has been named chief marketing officer.

- Mark Southerst, senior vice president and general counsel, has been elevated to chief legal officer.

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Used buses

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

for coach sales at Motor Coach Industries, also confirms the vitality of the pre-owned market. Asked about the flood of pre-owned coaches that glutted the market in 2004-05, he says simply: "It is gone."

According to Morrison, pre-owned coach inventories across the board are at all-time lows, and two- to four-year-old buses are hard to find.

DaimlerChrysler Commercial Buses North America made a strategic decision two years ago to reduce its inventory of used coaches, and it has done just that.

Jeff Shank, vice president of pre-owned and Dodge Sprinter sales at DCCB North America, says "DaimlerChrysler Commercial Buses is seeing increased pre-owned sales compared to the same time last year."

Starting last year, DCCB expanded its pre-owned sales staff throughout North America and actively targeted pre-owned markets in Florida, California, and New York/New Jersey, according to Shank.

An added element of DaimlerChrysler's strategy has been a preventative element. "DCCBNA continues to focus on making sound credit decisions with potential new and pre-owned coach customers," said Shank. Translation: While the emphasis on creditworthiness will not eliminate the impact of future market shocks like 9/11, the strategy should substantially reduce problems when markets are at normal levels.

Another manufacturer that has seen its used-coach inventory shrink is Prevost Car. Dan Wiltgen, vice president of coach sales, says the excessive inventory of recent years has disappeared.

According to Wiltgen, the turnaround began in 2005 and has continued.

Other segments of the industry fared differently following 9/11.

Transit Sales International is the largest seller of used transit

buses in the U.S. It was not affected by the surge in motorcoaches on the used-bus market. In addition to transit agencies, TSI sells to a niche market of private operators that need "people movers." That is, operators of airport ground transportation, employee shuttles, sight-seeing tours and the like.

Company vice president of sales Richard Sullivan says Transit Sales' market has been steady over the past several years and sales this year remain consistent with those of the recent past. However, Sullivan also notes they have seen marked growth in their shuttle bus leasing program every year.

Like ABC, TSI took in a number of MC-12s that Greyhound Lines disposed of late last year. Sullivan says those coaches have been selling well. The older-model coaches appeal to customers who want inexpensive, reliable, efficient transportation. Among the leading customers have been activity groups, churches and charter companies.

While the supply of used coaches has tightened, most industry sources say prices have firmed or risen, but they have not skyrocketed out of sight.

"Prices for pre-owned coaches have stabilized at a higher level after falling steadily in the post-9/11 years," says Wiltgen of Prevost Car.

In a bi-monthly feature labeled "Round Up," *National Bus Trader* magazine publishes a survey of used coach asking prices. While the survey presents a wide range of prices that make generalizations difficult, a comparison of a sampling of prices indicates that prices are on the rise, especially at the higher end of the market. Still, the increased demand and decreased supply has not caused a run-away market.

This may be where the second factor — concern over the 2007 reduced-emissions diesel engine standards — will have an impact.

Diesel engine manufacturers are prohibited from selling 2006 engines after Dec. 31. However, coach manufacturers do not face

the same restriction.

MCI, Van Hool and Prevost have stockpiled 2006 engines and expect to be building coaches equipped with the '06 engines well into the first quarter of next year.

However, when those 2006 engines have been sold, Foley of ABC expects demand for late model pre-owned coaches will increase.

Morrison of MCI shares that view. He says a lot of people thought 2006 would be a banner year for new bus sales and 2007 would be a great year for used buses. So far, the prediction for new bus sales has proven to be accurate. (See Aug. 15 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

Wiltgen says he has vacillated back and forth on the impact of the 2007 EPA engine rules on the pre-owned coach market.

He speculates that concern about the 2007 engines may be affecting the market this year on the supply side rather than on the demand side. That is, operators may be hanging onto their used coaches longer than they normally would to avoid being the first to buy coaches with the new engines.

Then there is the used-coach vendor who predicts that the market for used coaches in the next two years ought to be "astronomical."

Why buy a used coach?

Although their primary business is building and selling new buses, coach manufacturers readily acknowledge there are solid business reasons for choosing a quality used vehicle over a new one. These include:

- Lower payments in a time of uncertain operating costs (fuel prices, inflation, insurance, for example).

- Used coaches are sometimes paid for at the time of purchase or paid off quicker because they cost less, meaning they do not necessarily have to operate all the time to cover the payments.

- An unwillingness by some operators to be among the first to try the 2007 engines in revenue service.

Calendar

SEPTEMBER 2006

23-26 Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance 2006 Fall Workshop, The Fairmont Royal York Hotel, Toronto, Ont. Info: Go to www.cvsa.org.

29-Oct. 3 Virginia Motorcoach Association Annual Convention, Hotel Roanoke & Conference Center, Roanoke, Va. Info: www.vamotorcoach.com.

OCTOBER 2006

14-17 California Bus Association Convention & Trade Show, Doral Desert Princess Resort, Cathedral City, Calif. Info: www.cbabus.com or call (831) 633-1755.

23-25 BusCon, Navy Pier, Chicago. Info: Go to www.buscon-expo.com.

26-28 Gray Line Annual Meeting and Marketing Conference, Phoenix. Info: E-mail info@grayline.com or call (303) 394-6920.

NOVEMBER 2006

3-4 Northwest Motorcoach Association Rodeo and Annual Convention, Yakima, Wash. Info: (425) 971-6161 or go to www.nwmotorcoach.com.

Blue Bird

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

company doesn't expect to see significant changes in operations as a result of the sale, and management remains unchanged.

One of the immediate benefits of the move, he noted, is that it eliminates the company debt. Trouble with servicing its huge debt, along with a seasonal slowdown in sales, resulted in a temporary shutdown of the company in January, followed by a bankruptcy filing that was resolved in one day because of a prior agreement with creditors. (See Feb. 1 and March 1 issues of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

In recent months, the company has appeared to be on a noticeable upswing, announcing contracts, technological innovations and other moves that signaled an improved outlook.

The New York financial restructuring firm of Kroll Zolfo Cooper LLC served as the financial advisor to Blue Bird in connection with the purchase by Cerberus.

Last February, the chairman of Kroll Zolfo Cooper, Stephen F. Cooper, was named chairman of Blue Bird and two other senior Kroll Zolfo Cooper executives also assumed top positions at Blue Bird.

3-7 National Tour Association Annual Convention, Salt Lake City. Info: (800) 682-8886 or go to www.NTA.travel.

11-15 Ontario Motor Coach Association Annual Conference and Marketplace, Sheraton Downtown, Toronto. Info: (416) 229-6622 or go to www.omca.com.

People

Carsten J. Reinhardt has left **Detroit Diesel Corp.**, where he was president and CEO, to become senior vice president of **ArvinMeritor Inc.**, and president of its commercial vehicle systems business.

Reinhardt succeeds *Tom Gosnell*, who is retiring after 27 years.

"Carsten's track record for focusing on operational excellence, improving financial performance and executing growth initiatives will be a tremendous asset to maintaining and enhancing an already strong organization," said *Chip McClure*, ArvinMeritor's chairman, CEO and president.

Hank Phillips, who resigned as president of the **National Tour**

Association and from the association's management firm, **Host Communications Inc.**, has been retained as a consultant by the **American Tourism Society**.

Phillips' resignation from NTA is effective at the end of this month. During his 21-year tenure with NTA and Host, Phillips served in a variety of positions, becoming NTA president eight years ago.

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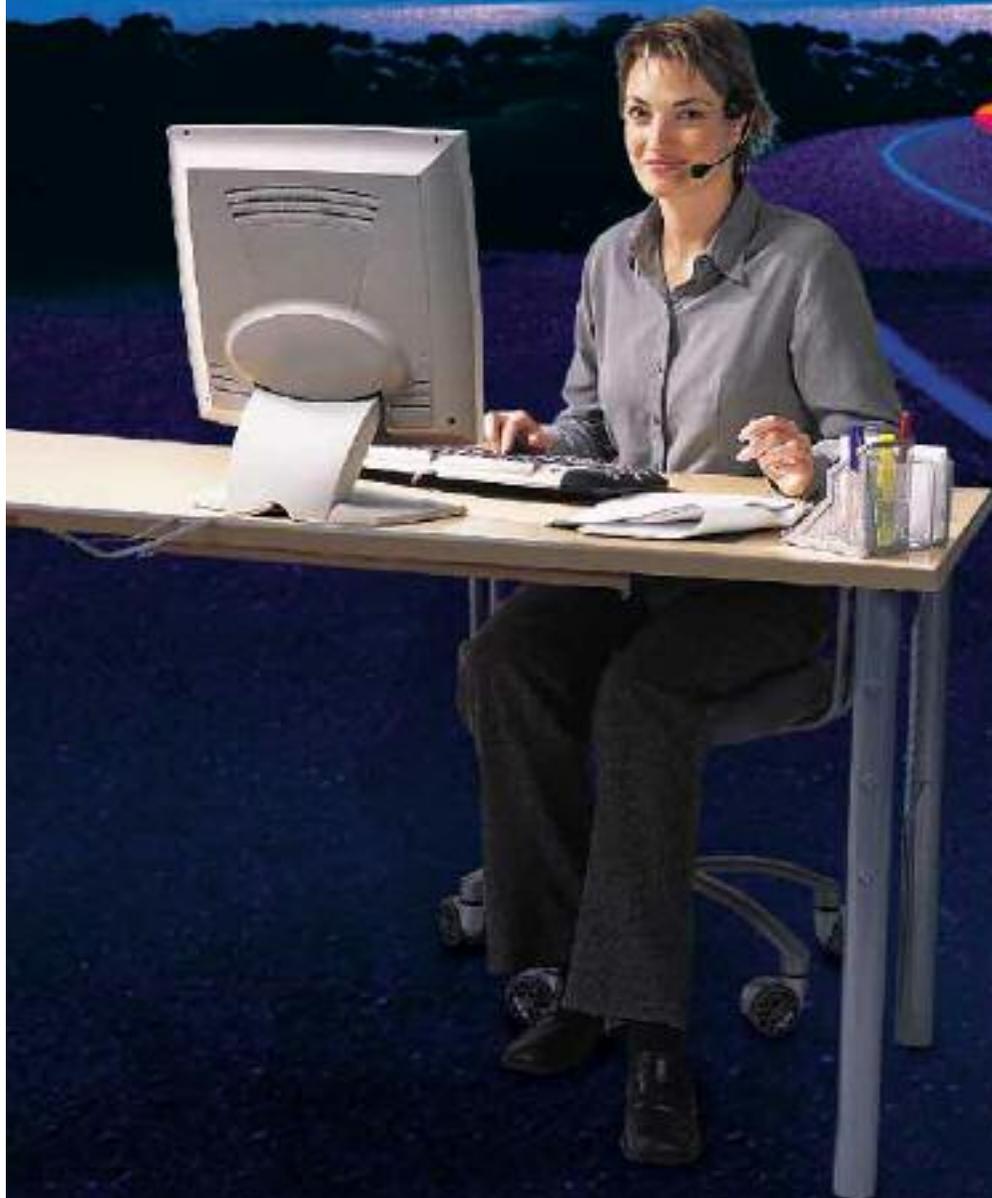


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