

Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

THE NEWS RESOURCE FOR THE BUS AND MOTORCOACH INDUSTRY

Sale of Coach USA companies in West, South is completed

MT. KISCO, N.Y. — If you operate motorcoaches in the West or in the south central United States, meet your newest competitor: CUSA, the largest spin-off of former Coach USA companies.

Creation of CUSA was wrapped up last month following two rapid-fire events: Regulatory approval of the sale of more than two dozen Coach USA companies, and completion of the business deal that shifted ownership of the Coach USA operations to a limited liability corporation set up to buy them.

CUSA is one of two divisions of newly formed KBUS Holdings LLC, and will operate the former Coach USA subsidiaries in eight western and south central states. A second division of KBUS is a leasing company that will own the buses operated by CUSA.

KBUS and CUSA were formed by an investment firm that specializes in corporate buyouts, Kohlberg & Co. of Mt. Kisco.

Kohlberg paid Stagecoach Group PLC of Perth, Scotland, \$155 million for the former Coach USA companies that generated revenues of \$215.9 million during the 12 months ended April 30. The operating profit for the businesses was \$14.6 million before goodwill and other factors.

It's expected that Craig Lentzsch, former president and CEO of Greyhound Lines, will be announced as president and CEO of CUSA. Lentzsch will centrally manage CUSA, probably from offices in Texas.

One of Lentzsch's chief lieutenants will be long-time business associate David Carroll, who

helped Lentzsch found BusLease, which eventually became MCI Financial Services. More recently, Carroll has been a consultant and a vice president at Coach USA.

Here's a complete list of the Coach USA companies acquired by KBUS/CUSA:

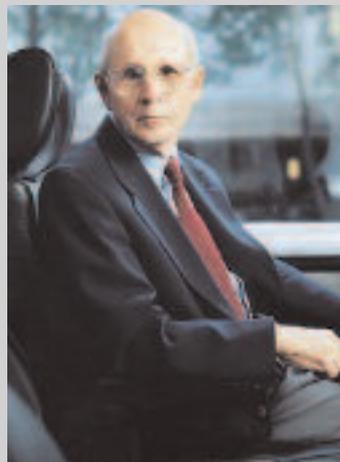
- All West Coachlines, Calif.
- American Charters & Tours, Texas
- Americoach Tours, Tenn.
- Antelope Valley Bus, Calif.
- Airport Bus of Bakersfield, Calif.
- Arrow Stage Lines, Arizona
- Bayou City Coaches, La.
- Blackhawk/Central City Express/Ace Express, Colo.
- Browder Tours, Tenn.
- California Charters
- Desert Stage Lines, Calif.
- El Expreso, Texas
- Express Shuttle, Texas
- Franciscan Lines, Calif.
- Fun Time Tours, Texas
- Goodall's Charter Bus Service, Calif.
- Grosvenor Bus Lines, Calif.
- Gulf Coast Transportation, Texas
- Kerrville Bus Company, Texas
- Community Rentals Co.
- Sunset Tours & Travel
- Vaught Bus Leasing Co.
- K-T Contract Services, Nevada
- PCSTC Inc. (Pacific Coast Sightseeing), Calif.
- Powder River Transportation Services, Wyo.
- Royal West Tours & Cruises, Calif.
- Stardust Tours-Memphis, Tenn.
- Texas Bus Lines
- Travel Impressions
- Valen Transportation, Calif.
- Worthen Van Service, Wyo.

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Limo Liner

America's newest luxury motorcoach service begins Oct. 1, making four daily runs between Boston and New York city. Owner Fergus McCann, lower left, has invested \$2 million in the service that features three E4500 MCI conversion coaches that seat 28.



Travel frustrations prompted McCann to create Limoliner.



Diabetics to get exemptions

WASHINGTON — Federal regulators are now accepting applications for exemptions from its rules that ban some diabetics from operating commercial vehicles.

The new initiative by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration will exempt certain insulin-treated diabetic bus and truck drivers from the diabetes prohibitions contained in Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations.

The program of exemptions is essentially an experiment and will

apply to drivers of commercial motor vehicles in interstate commerce and does not mean the FMCSA is amending its current diabetes standard.

"Our new program ... is a creative approach based on data from a panel of experts that will enable an additional group of skilled professionals to help keep (people and) freight moving in America while we keep a sharp eye on safety," said U.S. Transportation Secretary Norman Y. Mineta.

The FMCSA began accepting applications for diabetic exemptions Sept. 22.

The maximum exemption period is two years. However, the agency may renew exemptions at the end of the two-year period or after an exemption period expires. Under federal law, the agency may grant an exemption only if it is likely to achieve a level of safety that is equivalent to or greater than the level that would be achieved

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THE DOCKET

Tough Issues

A two-day workshop last month in Washington tackles two long-pending issues surfaced by the National Transportation Safety Board. **Page 4**

Poised to Strike

Key tourism and visitor groups in Pennsylvania are ready to tackle that state's franchise tax on coach companies. **Page 4**

Ouch in Ohio

For the first time, Ohio has imposed a sales tax on passenger

transportation services. **Page 6**

Battling New Orleans

The new Louisiana Motorcoach Association has its hands full fighting with city bureaucrats who want to impose new rules on coach, taxi and limousine operators. **Page 6**

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Sun Diego Charter is growing despite slow travel market

By Karen Crabtree

SAN DIEGO — The industry downturn that's nearly swamped many coach operators hasn't slowed Sun Diego Charter Co.

The six-year-old company purchased a larger facility this summer for its 42-bus fleet, expanded its operation to Los Angeles, and is planning to complete a West Coast triangle with expansion into Las Vegas within two years.

Additionally, the company bought into the International Motor Coach Group, becoming a shareholder of that organization of top coach operators.

In July, the company moved its entire San Diego operation from three separate yards to one larger facility it purchased in National

City, Calif., which is about five minutes south of downtown San Diego on Interstate 5.

The company also began serving the Los Angeles market with five coaches making runs to San Diego-area casinos. Last month, the Los Angeles operation was expanded with the addition of four contracts and four more buses, said Sun Diego President Rich Illes.

The company is renting space in L.A. but hopes to move to a larger facility that will accommodate 20 buses in the next six months.

The expansion in Los Angeles was always part of the plan, Illes said, "but I didn't see it happening this soon."

The growth began with L.A. to San Diego casino runs. "We saw the



need to service L.A. That was the basis and we'll expand from there."

While tourism remains weak across much of the nation, and the West Coast continues to see a decline in foreign travel dollars, Sun Diego is keeping its buses moving. Illes said his coaches are sold out 90 percent of the time.

Al Sherrer, director of operations at Sun Diego, attributes much

of the company's record growth to its customer service philosophy.

"We work very hard to give (customers) a positive experience from the moment they book their charter until the end," said Sherrer. "There's a lot of aftercare."

Illes agrees that customer service keeps customers coming back, but it is the pursuit of large events that come into town that

helps fuel growth.

"We are extremely aggressive in the market place, and we have a good management crew to support the infrastructure," he says.

Sun Diego's charter and contract business serves a diverse customer base, with its school trip business also continuing to expand. The average age of the Sun Diego bus fleet is about four years.

Prices of diesel fuel reach two-month low

The summer price surge of diesel fuel is clearly behind us but analysts are of two minds when it comes to what prices will do this winter.

Across the U.S., diesel prices during the last week in September dropped to their lowest level in nearly two months.

The average U.S. price peaked at just over \$1.50 a gallon (\$1.75 in California), during the last week in August. Since then, the price has declined four consecutive weeks and is now averaging under \$1.45 a gallon. That's the lowest point since the final week of July, when the average U.S. diesel fuel price was about \$1.44 a gallon.

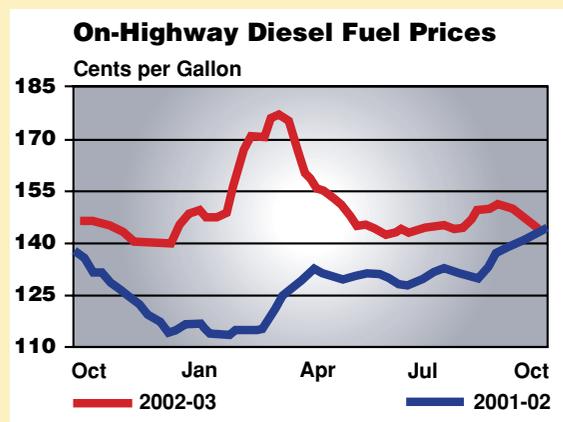
The price spread for a gallon of diesel across the U.S. is noticeably narrower — at 22 cents a gallon — than it was at the end of August when coach operators in California were paying 32 cents a gallon more than operators in lower Atlantic states.

The lowest diesel fuel prices remain in the lower Atlantic where it averages just under \$1.39 per gallon, while the highest prices are in California at nearly \$1.61 per gallon.

Diesel fuel prices have declined nearly 15 cents a gallon during the past month in California, while the slide in other parts of the country have ranged from 2 cents a gallon in New England and Central Atlantic states, to 4 or 5 cents a gallon in most other regions.

Meanwhile, the official start of the heating season began on the first day of this month. That typically signals a slow steady climb in diesel fuel prices from now until the middle of March.

What will happen this year is anybody's guess, but it seems smart to fear (and plan for) the worst. Here's the deal: Currently, there's plenty of diesel fuel in inventory. In fact, diesel inventories are at the highest level in four years. However, the inventory of heating oil is 16 percent lower than the five-year average.



Diesel Fuel Prices

Cents per Gallon	Price	Change from	
		Week Ago	Year Ago
U.S.	144.4	▼-2.7	▲ 2.7
East Coast	144.3	▼-1.8	▲ 4.4
New England	155.3	▼-1.5	▲ 9.6
Central Atlantic	155.1	▼-1.3	▲ 7.9
Lower Atlantic	138.7	▼-2.0	▲ 2.5
Midwest	142.6	▼-3.4	▲ 1.8
Gulf Coast	138.0	▼-3.0	▲ 0.4
Rocky Mountain	151.4	▼-2.8	▲ 4.7
West Coast	157.4	▼-3.0	▲ 4.0
California	160.9	▼-3.9	▲ 2.7

Diesel fuel ordinarily is more expensive than heating oil but when economic circumstances warrant, diesel is substituted for heating oil. If this is a mild winter, then there will be no circumstances to warrant substitution.

But, if this is a colder-than-normal winter or there are stretches where it is below normal, then diesel fuel prices could go through the roof, particularly in the Northeast U.S.

Croswell Bus Lines purchases Bus One, Greenlawn Transit

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Croswell Bus Lines of Williamsburg, Ohio, is purchasing the business and facilities of two affiliated Columbus-based coach companies, Bus One Inc. and Greenlawn Transit Lines/Greenlawn Charters & Tours.

Philip Schaeffing III, whose father founded Greenlawn 50 years ago, and his wife, Rose Ann, are selling their companies to Croswell, a third-generation coach operator that has been around for more than 80 years.

Croswell began operating out of the former Bus One-Greenlawn facilities in mid September, pending completion of the sale. The only yet-to-be-completed aspect of the deal was the transfer of the real estate.

Croswell brought its own buses to Columbus because the former Greenlawn-Bus One fleet was sold in a "Public Webcast Auction" on Sept. 17. (See story on Page 14.)

Croswell, which only operates MCI and Van Hool motorcoaches, was not interested in purchasing the Schaeffings' fleet because it was composed entirely of Setras and

Prevosts. The Schaeffings were industry rarities. They have never had an MCI in their 20+ bus fleet.

The purchase of Greenlawn and Bus One by Croswell is a major step for the company, whose base in Williamsburg is 35 miles east of Cincinnati in southwestern Ohio, near the state line with Kentucky.

Now Croswell has a major presence in the state capital of Columbus, where Greenlawn-Bus One was the largest hometown operator. Columbus is 111 miles northeast of Cincinnati and Williamsburg, up Interstate 71.

Croswell is headed by company President John W. Croswell and Chief Operating Officer Mike Murray. The company has a fleet of 30 motorcoaches and 5 midsize buses — 3 cutaways and 2 shuttles.

Murray said Croswell is significantly expanding its fleet with the Greenlawn-Bus One purchase. The number of motorcoaches is growing to 40 through a deal involving the purchase of 12 new and 5 used MCIs, and the trading in of 7 coaches.

The dozen new buses will be a

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14 ▶

THE DOCKET

Effort being planned to eliminate franchise tax in Pennsylvania

HARRISBURG, Pa. — Eastern motorcoach companies whose feathers have been badly ruffled by the stepped up effort in Pennsylvania to collect franchise taxes from out-of-state coach operators should sit tight for a couple of months.

That's the advice of the Pennsylvania Tourism and Lodging Association, which is planning an aggressive campaign to eliminate the controversial and costly tax.

"Our goal is to do away with the tax and have the issue resolved by the end of the year," association President Barry Wickes told *Bus & Motorcoach News*.

Timing is everything

He said the launching of a joint campaign by his organization of hotels, motels, restaurants and tourism destinations with the Pennsylvania Association of Visitor and Convention Bureaus is being held in abeyance pending adoption of a new state budget.

"There are a number of major issues, such as education funding and property tax reform, that need to be resolved and the governor, legislature and Department of Revenue are heavily involved in them," he said. "I have learned that timing is everything and this is not the time for us to come along and make a big squawk."

In other words, Wickes doesn't want to muddy the tax waters while Pennsylvania's entire political and government leadership is embroiled in a state budget battle.

He said once the budget is completed — possibly within a month — the push to do away with the franchise tax on coach operators could begin in earnest.

"We will start an aggressive lobbying campaign at that time. In the meantime, my advice (to motorcoach operators) is to just sit tight," Wickes said.

Although Pennsylvania, like most states, is struggling financially, Wickes expressed confidence in being able to resolve the franchise tax issue, especially when

the projected tax revenue from motorcoaches is compared with what the state would lose in tourism dollars if operators decided to quit coming to the state.

The franchise tax issue has been a sore spot for tour operators since early in the year when state legislators demanded the Department of Revenue step up its collection of the tax from out-of-state motorcoach companies that do business in Pennsylvania.

The department responded by mailing estimated bills to operators for \$33,000 for 10 years of back taxes. The bills, many of which went to companies that had not even been in business for 10 years, included \$3,000 in taxes and \$300 in penalties for each of the 10 years.

Motorcoach operators immediately protested and some called for a boycott of the state until the tax situation was resolved, a threat that worries Wickes.

"While we don't see it as a problem right now, it is a concern for us because we don't want the state to develop a black eye," he emphasized.

The problem heated up again last month at the annual meeting of the Virginia Motorcoach Association. Outgoing association President Warren Newton of Newton Bus Service in Gloucester, Va., resurfaced the idea of a boycott.

His remarks angered several members of the Pennsylvania Tourism and Lodging Association who are associate members of the Virginia association and who happened to be in the audience.

UMA's Parra mediates

"We had a subsequent meeting with everybody involved and I think we ironed everything out," said Victor Parra, president and CEO of the United Motorcoach Association, who also was in the audience. "But we did explain the gravity of the tax situation to them."

He said many operators were



Victor Parra of the UMA.

not aware the tourism and lodging group is planning a lobbying effort to get rid of the tax for the motorcoach industry.

A key problem with the tax, said Parra, is that it is extremely complicated to figure out because it is based on so many variables, including mileage, number of trips and revenues. "It's an administrative nightmare and in many cases it costs more to figure out the tax than what the total tax actually is," he noted.

Meanwhile, the Pennsylvania Department of Revenue says it has some good news for the motorcoach industry.

Department spokeswoman Stephanie Weyant said that while motorcoach operators have been under the impression the tax applies only to companies that travel more than 50,000 loaded miles in the state in a single year or make more than 12 trips to the state during that period, this is not the case.

"Actually, the tax has applied to all motorcoach carriers traveling in the state, regardless of the number of miles or number of trips," she said.

But that's about to change.

Weyant says the department plans to issue a policy statement in two or three weeks that will put the 50,000-mile and 12-trip regulation in place. "That should eliminate those companies that are not doing very much business in Pennsylvania," she said.

In addition, she said the tax "is scheduled" to be phased out by 2010 by reducing it slightly each year. However, the phase-out already has been delayed by one year and the governor's proposed budget for this year includes another year's delay until 2011.

FMCSA workshops tackle two long-delayed coach safety recommendations

WASHINGTON — The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration has taken a big step toward resolving two long-pending motorcoach safety issues that were the focus of investigations and recommendations by the National Transportation Safety Board.

The FMCSA convened a two-day workshop last month to thrash out whether it should mandate safety briefings for motorcoach passengers and whether it should publish a booklet to educate drivers about the proper use of retarders and engine brakes.

After listening to a cross-section of safety experts at the workshop, the FMCSA tacitly agreed that a rule requiring a passenger safety briefing would be impossible to enforce and therefore not workable, and it would take a different approach in dealing with the retarder and engine brake education issue.

Attendees at the workshop included representatives from the Federal Aviation Administration, the Federal Railroad Administration, the NTSB, coach manufacturers, the FMCSA, the United Motorcoach Association and the American Bus Association, plus motorcoach safety directors.

The FMCSA, UMA and the ABA worked for months researching the two issues and creating the list of attendees who had the necessary experience and expertise to address the issues realistically, said Norman Littler, senior vice president for government and industry relations at UMA.

Following its investigation of a crash that occurred near Stoney Creek, Va., in July 1997, the NTSB issued a recommendation calling for mandatory passenger safety briefings. In the crash, one young passenger drowned and 34 children were hurt, many badly.

The NTSB, in its formal report, identified the lack of a passenger safety briefing as a contributing factor to post-crash confusion among passengers.

The safety board recommend-

ed the FMCSA, UMA and ABA work to develop a passenger safety briefing protocol. It also proposed the FMCSA consider making passenger briefings mandatory through a rulemaking.

The group attending the workshop reached a consensus that a rulemaking was neither desirable nor prudent due to the near impossibility of enforcement.

It was the group's recommendation that the best way to deal with the issue is to have the industry create the message and urge a "suggested practices" approach. It also was agreed that industry insurance companies need to take an active role in the delivery of the program if there is to be any hope of success.

The FMCSA will review the results at a future date, and it reserves the right to initiate a rulemaking if it is determined to be warranted.

The second day of the workshop dealt with a recommendation the NTSB developed after its investigation of the December 1999, crash of a tour bus near Canon City, Colo. In that incident, the driver died along with two teenage passengers.

The bus skidded off a steep embankment in icy conditions, rolled and came to rest on its roof. During the investigation it was determined the driver had the hydraulic drive-line retarder engaged during the descent even though operation of the retarder in slippery road conditions is not recommended.

The NTSB concluded the driver had not had sufficient training on the proper use of the retarder and recommended that the FMCSA, UMA and the ABA create and disseminate a brochure to carriers on this issue.

After lengthy discussion, the workshop group decided the best way to deal with the issue was to develop a list of topics and suggestions that were necessary to provide the message and have the FMCSA contract the program out to a third party for completion.

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New Battle of New Orleans shapes up for bus operators

NEW ORLEANS — Barely four months old and the Louisiana Motorcoach Association already has its hands full battling an old adversary for bus and shuttle operators — the City of New Orleans.

It has been nearly five years since a federal court slapped down New Orleans' ill-starred attempt to regulate the charter operations of Greyhound Lines, but the city bureaucrats keep trying.

Now, the city is trying to regulate coach, tour, shuttle, taxi and limousine operators on a variety of fronts, with the smaller sightseeing and tour operators apparently bearing the brunt of the onslaught.

Among other things, the city is attempting to restrict competition by limiting the entry of new companies, and protecting the working conditions, wages and competitive position of existing firms.

"It's going to be a Battle on the Bayou," is the way Louisiana Motorcoach Association President Louis Sanders describes the free-for-all.

Here, in a nutshell, are the initiatives the city has launched in recent months:

- New regulations designed to limit the noise and disruption caused by groups and walking tours in the city's famed French Quarter.
- A crackdown on small tour planners and organizers that operate in the French Quarter and central business district and promote tours to area plantations and bayous, commonly called swamp tours.
- A restrictive new ordinance that applies to for-hire vehicles operated within New Orleans or between a point in New Orleans and a location not more than 10 miles from the city limits. The ordinance is easily the worst bureaucratic outrage. It says:
 - Any person driving a for-hire vehicle must get a city driver permit. Obtaining a permit requires tak-

ing a test that has among its subjects "the history and geography of the city area" and "courtesy."

- Operators of for-hire vehicles must obtain a city certificate of public necessity and convenience.

Among the factors to be considered by the city when granting this operating authority are the effect on existing certificate holders, and on the working conditions and wages of drivers of vehicles operated by existing certificate holders.

Last but not least, a new company seeking operating authority must demonstrate that its service is not being adequately provided by existing companies.

One New Orleans' charter bus operator already has elevated the issue of the ordinance requirements to the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration.

Dean Schuler, chief executive of Carey New Orleans, has gotten an informal opinion from the FMCSA's deputy chief counsel that says the ordinance clearly violates federal law prohibiting states and cities from enacting laws that require interstate or intrastate charter bus companies to obtain an operating authority from the city and require charter bus drivers to obtain city driver permits.

"We may have to go to court again" just like Greyhound did in 1998, says Schuler.

Henry Smith of Starcoach in New Orleans has a simpler solution: "I just put 'em on ignore," he laughs. "New Orleans is getting greedy," says Smith. "They want to regulate everything."

These latest battles in New Orleans are particularly galling to Sanders and other organizers of the Louisiana Motorcoach Association — in more ways than one. They're committed to having a statewide association but the focus of attention right off the bat, like it often is in Louisiana, is on New Orleans.

Some coach travel becomes subject to Ohio sales tax

COLUMBUS, Ohio — It's not often motorcoach operators are lumped together with tattoo and massage parlors, snow removal companies, and body piercing and branding services.

But they have been in Ohio, and it isn't pleasant.

All of these services plus a dozen or so more, including in-state bus services, are now subject to sales taxes in Ohio.

Ohio significantly broadened its sales tax base this summer by adding nearly 20

services that previously had been exempt from sales taxes.

Legislators also boosted the statewide sales tax to 6 percent. Many counties and municipalities have their own sales tax.

Now, coach companies, taxicabs, limousines, shuttles, bus and air charter services, and any other companies that transport individuals within the state must charge sales tax. Only transportation that begins, stays within and ends in Ohio is subject to the tax.

The tax does not apply if any portion of the transportation is outside Ohio. The tax also does not apply to public transit systems, airlines, school districts or ambulance services.

Coach and shuttle operators, along with other private transportation providers, must get a vendor's license at their county auditor's office. The fee is \$25. Companies already having a vendor's license do not need to obtain a second license.

The tax to be charged is the one applicable in the county where the company is located.

The tax is to be charged only for the fully allocated cost of the transportation services.

That includes the use of the vehicle, including overhead costs; fuel and maintenance costs; all driver costs, including food and lodging; parking and tolls, and any other costs for providing transportation services.

Not to be included in transportation service costs are "tour services," such as the cost of tickets or other admission charges for passengers, accommodations for passengers, guide services and "similar travel package elements."

Additional information on the transportation service sales tax is available by calling the Ohio Department of Taxation at (888) 405-4039 or by going to www.state.oh.us/tax.

'The statewide sales tax was boosted to 6 percent.'

Louisiana Motorcoach Association fast tracks organization, workplan

MARRERO, La. — The ball is officially rolling for the new Louisiana Motorcoach Association.

Organized late this spring by operators from across the state, the association has set a fast pace designed to build a meaningful organization that can be a positive force for tourism and travel growth in Louisiana.

Key organizational steps that have been accomplished include:

- Selecting a board of directors
- Adopting bylaws and a code of ethics
- Approving an application form for both operator and associate members
- Identifying key goals

The charter board of directors is composed of:

President: Louis Sanders, Louisiana Coaches Trailways, New Orleans

Vice President: J.H. Byrd Jr., Salter Bus Lines, Inc., Jonesboro

Secretary/Treasurer: Gayle Williams, Williams Tours & Transportation, New Orleans

Directors: Ronnie Cutrer, Dixieland Charters, Baton Rouge; Callen Hotard, Calco Travel, Litcher; Byron Kohoutek, Kohoutek Travel Inc., Kenner; Harold Lewis Sr., Lewis Coaches Inc., New Orleans; Sandy Smith, Starcoach Transportation, New

Orleans; Wellington Lain, Loews Express, New Orleans; Kelly Hatcher, Motor Coach Industries (nonvoting), and Ken Presley, Service Insurance Agency (nonvoting).

Besides MCI and Service Insurance, the association also has gotten strong supplier support from ABC Companies, Prevost Car and Setra of North America.

The association has hired Morris Meeting Management of Gladys, Va., to coordinate activities.

Among challenges facing the association, said Sanders, "is to promote our industry, effect changes in existing laws, promote operator and associate member networking, and make Louisiana the one-of-a-kind destination that we all know it is."

Other key priorities of the association include:

- Recruiting members
- Developing the organization's first newsletter
- Organizing a marketplace next September
- Tackling issues that a united industry voice might help resolve or ameliorate, including high insurance costs, working with airports and restrictions on coaches by municipalities.

"Professionalism and relationship-building among the members will be of utmost importance."

Public agencies seek private charter firms

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

The United Motorcoach Association urges operators to respond to these public notices:

Excelsior Springs, Mo. Deadline: Oct. 12, 2003. Write to: City Manager, City of Excelsior Springs, 103 East Water Street,

Excelsior Springs, MO 64024. Phone: (816) 630-0754.

Lancaster, Pa. Deadline: Oct. 13, 2003. Write to: James J. Lutz, Executive Director, Red Rose Transit Authority, 45 Erick Road, Lancaster, PA 17601. Phone: (717)397-5613.

Muskingum & Guernsey Counties, Ohio. Deadline: 4 p.m. Oct. 17, 2003. Write to: Mark McClanan, General Manager, South East Area Transit, 375 Fairbanks Street, Zanesville, Ohio 43701. Phone: (740) 454-8573.

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Legal sharks take aim at motorcoach industry

If you sometimes feel like there's a big, bright red bull's eye painted on the back of your coaches, you're not paranoid. There is.

And it is society's worst hunter-killers, personal injury lawyers, who are taking aim at it.

The latest evidence of the coach industry's high-profile status as a target for ambulance chasing attorneys comes in the form of a Web site that claims to be a nationwide legal information service but is, in fact, a not-very-subtle marketing ploy for drumming up business for personal injury attorneys.

And the business of the Web attorneys is extracting the maximum amount of money they can in bus accident claims.

Check out www.personal-injury-attorney.us.com. Look for the bus accident-specific page by using the site map.

To give you an idea of the level of deceit, one of the Web pages includes a list of bus safety tips, appropriate federal motor carrier safety regulations, and driver qualifications. The goal, obviously, is to build a sense of caring and credibility.

It's smarmy.

The Web site lumps bus accident claims right in there with such favorite personal injury targets as medical malpractice, product liability, dog bites, wrongful death, slip and fall accidents, and auto crashes.

"We are a nationwide legal

information service and we can take the guesswork out of selecting an expert personal injury attorney to maximize your accident compensation settlement," states the Web site right off the bat. "We only recommend specialist trial lawyers with many years experience of successful verdicts and settlements who are able to handle claims varying from minor whiplash, to injuries of the utmost severity, including wrongful death, brain damage and spinal injuries.

"Our specialist lawyers normally deal with claims using a contingent fee arrangement which means that if you don't win then they don't get paid. If the case is lost then you will not receive any bill for the lawyer's legal fees. Your attorney will advise you in full about the way contingent fee arrangements operate.

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expert personal injury attorney will phone you immediately to discuss your accident or medical malpractice claim. You will be given free advice on how best to pursue your claim and what actions you should take to preserve your legal

rights. You deserve the best so don't settle for less."

thousands of dollars out of motorcoach companies. Read on:

"Our personal injury lawyers have a client-centered approach and focus principally on your needs. If you choose our lawyers to represent you in your claim they will provide committed and vigorous representation on your behalf and will ensure that you receive justice by zealously representing your legal position above all else. You can rely on our advocates to take care of your compensation claim in a comprehensive, helpful, sympathetic and professional manner.

"Our attorneys will respect your confidentiality at all times and will explain legal issues clearly and without jargon. You will be kept fully updated in writing about the progress of your claim and your lawyer will always be available to discuss your case on the telephone. Your calls will be answered promptly and faxes, e-mails and letters will, where possible be dealt with on the same day as they are received. You will receive a complete professional

service from a specialist personal injury attorney."

And just who are these saintly attorneys? Good luck trying to find out. Nowhere on the Web site does it list a company name, address or phone number. It apparently exists somewhere out there on the great information super highway.

By the way, here are the bus safety tips posted on the Web site. You may want to share them with your customers:

- Don't wait for a bus in or near the street; stay safe on the sidewalk.
- Always enter the bus through the front door.
- Never stand in the stairwell or in front of the yellow line near the driver.
- Don't stand near the doors while the bus is moving.
- Avoid conversation with the operator while the bus is in motion.
- Always wait until the bus comes to a complete stop before exiting.
- Stay seated while the bus is in motion unless you are holding on to a handrail.
- Never cross in front of or behind a bus. Drivers cannot see you.

It doesn't say so but you can bet that if a client fails to follow any of these tips and ends up being injured, one of the amorphous attorneys at www.personal-injury-attorney.us.com will be only too happy to sue.



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Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

ISSUE NO. 15
A PUBLICATION OF THE UNITED MOTORCOACH ASSOCIATION

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ABC Service America begins drive to fill service, repair niche

LAS VEGAS — Eighteen months ago, ABC Companies announced it was diversifying by launching a new subsidiary called ABC Service America.

The one-stop, express-service business opened its first location less than two months ago and based on the initial reception it expects to open a second ABC Service America outlet during the first quarter of next year and begin selling franchises later in the year.

ABC believes it has identified an overlooked and underserved automotive service niche that ABC Service America can fill: Express preventative maintenance, diagnostic and minor repair services for recreational vehicles, motorcoach coaches, commercial vehicles and even passenger cars.

While it offers many of the same services as the quick-lube industry, ABC Service America outlets will provide a wider assortment of services to a broader range of vehicles.

The 6,900-square-foot Las Vegas branch has two oversize lube bays, a service and detail area, a wash center that can handle all sizes of vehicles, and waste disposal facilities for both RVs and motorcoaches.

"We are now meeting a need that has long been ignored by the express service industry," says ABC Service America Vice President Ron Similo.

ABC Companies hired Similo to develop and implement the ABC Service America concept. He's responsible for supervising day-to-day operations, develop-



ing retail partner alliances, site selection, store development and coordinating brand support and marketing.

Similo has more than 25 years experience in the industry, having held executive positions at both Pennzoil Products Company and The Valvoline Company.

The Las Vegas operation, which is roughly two miles west of Las Vegas Boulevard (The Strip) and two miles south of Tropicana

Avenue, opened significantly behind schedule largely because of the incredibly long wait needed to obtain building permits in the nation's fast-growing city.

During the delay, Similo refined the concept, including an increased focus on the RV market, whether purpose-built recreational vehicles or luxury coach conversions.

The next store is slated for Orlando in the spring, with

Chicago to follow at a yet-to-be-determined date.

The Las Vegas ABC Service America outlet features:

- Citgo premium lube products
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For information, call 800-222-2875 or visit www.abcserviceamerica.com.

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INDUSTRY NEWS

Calendar of Events

OCTOBER 2003

11-12 The Motorcoach Bus Society: Annual Convention, Boston, Mass. Info: Go to www.motorbussociety.org, or e-mail Jerry Squier, vice president conventions, at glsquier@pacbell.net.

12 Prevost Car Maintenance Training Seminar, Ephrata, Pa. Info: Call (800) 65-PREVO.

17-22 Busworld, Kortrijk, Belgium. Info: Go to www.busworld.org or e-mail info@busworld.org.

19 Prevost Car Maintenance Training Seminar, Trenton, N.J. Info: Call (800) 65-PREVO.

26-28 BusCon 2003, Las Vegas. Info: (310) 533-2556 or e-mail info@bobitexpos.com.

NOVEMBER 2003

1-5 California Bus Assn.: Convention & Trade Show, Doral Palm Springs Resort, Cathedral City, Calif. Info: (800) 664-2877 or go to www.cbabus.com.

2 Ontario Attractions trade show, Westin Harbour Castle Hotel, Toronto. Info: (416) 229-6622 or go to www.omca.com.

2-5 Ontario Motor Coach Assn.: Annual Conference & Marketplace, Toronto. Info: (416) 229-6622. E-mail: info@omca.com, or go to www.omca.com.

8-12 Canadian Urban Transit Assn.: Fall Conference & Trans-Expo, Toronto. Info: (416) 365-9800 or go to www.cutaactu.ca.

10-12 SAE Int'l Truck & Bus: 2003 Meeting & Exhibition, Fort Worth Convention Center, Fort Worth, Texas. Info: (724) 776-4841 or go to www.sae.org.

14-18 National Tour Assn.: Annual Convention, Charlotte, N.C. Info: (800) 682-8886. E-mail: questions@ntastaff.com, or go to www.ntaonline.com.

JANUARY 2004

11 Prevost Car Maintenance Training Seminar Quebec. Info: Call (877) 520-7386.

NEOPLAN restructures financially

LAMAR, Colo. — NEOPLAN USA Corporation, which has battled for more than two decades to remain competitive in the U.S. transit bus and coach industry, has staved off bankruptcy with a painful financial restructuring.

The deal reportedly required a handful of banks and investment institutions to write off a large chunk of their NEOPLAN debt, and the company's principal owner to pump millions more into the company.

In a statement, NEOPLAN said that completion of the deal substantially improves its liquidity, enabling it to meet its ongoing obligations to vendors, creditors and other stakeholders. And, most importantly, it can now bid on new contracts and deliver on existing contracts it has with public transit agencies.

In executing the plan, NEOPLAN has reduced its senior secured debt by 75 percent, or more than \$39 million, resulting in a substantial de-leveraging of its balance sheet.

It also lined up \$5 million in revolving credit, giving it additional liquidity, and got \$10 million in

new collateral support from its majority shareholder, Willis Stein & Partners of Chicago. The Willis Stein investment helps NEOPLAN meet surety bond requirements so it can bid on contracts.

Finally, NEOPLAN sold key

Investments of Oakbrook Terrace, Ill., and Merrill Lynch.

Willis Stein, the leading private equity investment firm that acquired control of NEOPLAN five years ago, remains its controlling shareholder.

Currently, Neoplan is delivering the industry's first low-floor articulated buses powered by CNG engines to Boston MTA. It also recently completed development of an electric trolley bus for Boston, and expects to have that bus in production in short order.

In addition, Neoplan will start production soon for New Jersey Transit of the industry's first radiator-over-engine design in an articulated bus.

"These innovations ... make NEOPLAN a truly distinctive competitor in the industry," the company says.

There are an estimated 6,000 NEOPLAN buses on North American highways and streets. And although NEOPLAN withdrew from the motorcoach market more than a year ago, it continues to support NEOPLAN coaches through its important NEOPART subsidiary.

'NEOPLAN has completed development of an electric trolley bus.'

vendors on the idea of deferring repayment of their claims and even extending new terms.

"We are now working from a financial foundation that is stable," NEOPLAN President John Russell was quoted as saying.

Before the restructuring, seven financial institutions reportedly held NEOPLAN debt or had a financial interest in the company. That number has been consolidated to three: ING, the giant Dutch-owned financial services company whose North American headquarters is in Atlanta; Van Kampen

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John Madden stars at MCI event

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. — The postcard invitation simply read: "Meet Madden at the Meadowlands." And upwards of 100 motorcoach operators from throughout the eastern U.S. couldn't refuse the opportunity.

After all, the event was just a few days after a prime Monday Night Football match-up and television's best-known football analyst, former Oakland Raiders Head Coach John Madden, was going to be on hand to talk, sign autographs and pose for pictures.

Oh, yes, Madden also plugged MCI coaches, which he does very well and with seemingly genuine sincerity.

Between August and February every year, Madden spends nearly as much time in an E4500 model MCI as anyone in North America as he crisscrosses the U.S. for the following week's Monday night football game broadcast by his employer, ABC Sports.

Madden also is a spokesman for MCI and was the star attraction for an early fall sales event sponsored by MCI and Detroit Diesel Corp. at Giants Stadium in East Rutherford.

Held in one of the stadium's parking lots and private dining rooms, the day-long event included guided tours of the stadium, test drives of an interesting assortment of MCI coaches, both new and used, and plenty of food.

Operators flocked in from New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and other nearby states for a chance to ask Madden to size up the Bears, the Steelers, the Giants, the Raiders and other NFL teams, and to get their photos taken with the football legend.

On hand were most of the top executives of MCI, both sales and administrative, including President and COO Tom Sorrells; key executives from JLL Partners, the private investment firm that owns MCI, including Senior Professional Jeffrey Lightcap, and the senior bus and coach sales manager at Detroit Diesel, Mark Summers.

The demonstrator coaches on display for the event ranged from a refurbished 1992 102C3 with 821,000 miles, to brand new D-, E- and J-model coaches. Also on hand was the Outback Steakhouse Madden Cruiser. Thanks to good timing, a

handful of operators got to visit Madden inside his coach.

Two of the demonstrator coaches featured ZF-AS Tronic transmissions. A new J4500 model had a ZF coupled to a Caterpillar C-12 engine. More noteworthy, however, was a 2000 DL3 MCI, with nearly 89,000 miles, that had been converted to a ZF-AS Tronic.

In fact, MCI announced at the Madden event that it will shortly begin marketing a kit for converting three of its coach models to the ZF transmission. A conversion kit for D-model coaches equipped with Detroit Diesel Series 60 engines is expected to be available this month or next. E- and J-model kits will follow. The kits will be an off-the-shelf item available from MCI Fleet Support.

MCI executives said they can show an operator an analysis that demonstrates the payback for converting to a ZF-AS Tronic is as little as two years, with the savings coming in the way of reduced costs of fluids, filters, fuel and cooling demands.

Near the end of the Q&A session with Madden, an operator



raised his hand and asked the former coach a question that seemed to hang in the air for the briefest of moments. "What?" asked the questioner, did Madden like about his MCI cruiser. MCI executives held their collective breaths.

Then, Madden answered with one word: "Everything," pausing and adding, "there is nothing bad

about the cruiser."

After spending another minute extolling the virtues of the cruisers he has used over the years, Madden came up with one of his colorful analogies that seems to fit most over-the-road buses. "They're like old linemen," he said. "They're solid upfront. They just remind me of an offensive lineman."

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INDUSTRY NEWS

CUSA

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Combined, the companies operate more than 1,150 vehicles and employ 2,200 people.

In late June, when KBUS asked the U.S. Department of Transportation Surface Transportation Board to approve the deal, most of the companies had satisfactory Federal Motor Carrier Safety ratings. The exceptions were Grosvenor Bus Lines and Sun Tours & Travel, which had conditional ratings, and Express Shuttle, Franciscan Lines and Stardust Tours, which were not rated.

Part of the KBUS-Stagecoach sales agreement provides that Coach USA will provide operational and managerial assistance during a 6-to-12-month transition period. All "qualified" employees of the companies being acquired are to be offered employment by CUSA or the leasing company.

Approval of the transaction by the Surface Transportation Board turned out to be little more than a formality.

The board's okay was contingent on whether comments were filed opposing the purchase. The only comment filed was a letter and a copy of a court order informing the board that a judgment of nearly \$600,000 had been entered against Valen Transportation in Las Vegas. Valen is one of the companies being acquired as part of the deal.

However, the letter did not state any opposition to the sale. Had it done so it might have triggered formal proceedings and a more critical examination of the deal by the board.

Under federal law, the Surface Transportation Board must approve a transaction if it finds the deal to be consistent with the public interest.



Sale of Coach USA units nearly complete

PERTH, Scotland — So, what's left of Coach USA that's for sale?

Not much.

Stagecoach Group PLC, the Perth-based parent company of Coach USA, has just a handful of pieces of the company left to sell — a few taxi and shuttle operations and Coach Canada, which has motorcoach operating units in Ontario and Quebec.

Since the Scottish company launched its aggressive program to sell most of the tour and charter companies, transit operations and taxi businesses acquired by Coach USA between 1995 and 1999, it has sold all it wants with the exception of Coach Canada and taxi businesses in Florida, San Diego, Minneapolis, Pittsburgh and Denver.

Principally what will remain after those operations are sold is Coach USA's strong motorcoach presence in the New York-New Jersey markets and upper Midwest, including Chicago.

The latest unit to sell is the huge

Coach USA-owned taxi operation in Texas. A newly formed private investment group, called Texas

Taxi Inc., has purchased the business for \$28 million.

The Texas division was the largest of Coach USA's taxi units and included operations in Houston, San Antonio and Austin. Combined, the three locations have about 350 employees and upwards of 2,100 vehicles.

Another taxi division that reportedly is close to being sold is Pittsburgh Transportation, a taxicab operation that owns a string of companies, including Yellow Cabs of Pittsburgh and Express Shuttle USA.

Since the first of the year, a steady string of sales of Coach USA operations have been announced

or completed. The combined value of the deals is close to \$300 million, and represents more than 50 per-

cent of the book value of Coach USA as it stood this spring.

Stagecoach Group Chief Executive Brian Souter says the sale of Coach USA businesses is about wrapped up. "We are making good progress in negotiations for the sale of our remaining taxi operations ... and are continuing to pursue opportunities for the disposal of the Canadian region," he notes.

Stagecoach has taken a series of significant write downs at Coach USA during the past three years, reducing the carrying value of the company to \$597 million. The biggest write down came early this year when Stagecoach lopped \$910

million off the value of Coach USA. Stagecoach purchased Coach USA for \$1.87 billion early in 1999.

If there is a silver lining in all of this, it certainly rests in the bank accounts of Souter and former Stagecoach and Coach USA CEO Keith Cochrane.

For switching from board chairman to chief executive, and executing the plan to streamline Coach USA and make other changes at Stagecoach, Souter won a 72 percent pay increase. His remuneration for fiscal 2003 was more than \$1.26 million, up from a more modest \$735,000 in fiscal 2002. Plus, Souter got a performance bonus of more than \$500,000 and various other perks totaling more than \$120,000.

Cochrane, who quit last year rather than do what Souter ended up doing, got a going-away present of \$1.17 million in severance payments.

And who said the Scots are tight-fisted?

'The biggest write down came early this year when Stagecoach lopped \$910 million off the value of Coach USA.'

See a security threat? Phone new TSA center

WASHINGTON — Something new for your drivers to remember: Where to report "transportation security incidents" that occur in the U.S.

The Transportation Security Administration has a center that handles all transportation security incident reporting.

"Please use it as one of your first points of contact when reporting a transportation security incident," says Darrin Mc-

Greevy, a TSA program analyst.

In other words, if a driver ever witnesses, is involved in or suspects any sort of security incident or threat, one of the early calls he or she makes should be to the center. The first calls, however, should still be to first responders — law enforcement agencies.

The phone number for the TSA center is (703) 563-3237. Don't be put off by the rapid-fire answering style.

Industry recovers from Isabel

RICHMOND, Va. — Recovery by the motorcoach industry from last month's Hurricane Isabel was uneven, owing largely to problems getting electric power restored in nine states and the District of Columbia.

When Isabel hit North Carolina and other southeastern and mid-Atlantic states during the third week in September, intercity bus service was disrupted from Florida to New York City. Greyhound and Trailways coaches were halted and terminals closed

throughout the region.

Many locations were closed for only a day, however, as managers worked to restore service and keep passengers moving. Interstate highways were generally passable.

Lingering problems were caused by the extensive power outages in Virginia, North Carolina, Maryland, Pennsylvania and five other states. Getting fuel was a problem in some areas because there was no electricity for fuel pumps.

Richmond, a major connecting point for north and south buses,

experienced more delays than most locations because of the heavy storm damage suffered by Virginia.

Intercity bus service was restored more quickly than public transit systems in many places. Downed trees, flooding and flooding concerns hampered restoration of service, particularly in Virginia.

The shutdown of the federal government in Washington, D.C., for two days severely impacted tour operators and charters visiting the capital. Monuments were closed shortly before and after the storm.

Diabetes

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

without the exemption.

"FMCSA believes that thorough screening of exemption applicants and periodic monitoring of their safety performance is the most practical way to ensure safety on the nation's highways," said FMCSA Administrator Annette M. Sandberg.

FMCSA will keep the diabetes exemption docket open for new information and data on alternatives to the specific exemption conditions that were announced when the new program was unveiled last month.

Also, FMCSA will collect additional information about insulin-treated diabetic drivers and in the future may modify the program based on the new information.

Before granting an individual exemption, the FMCSA must publish a notice in the Federal Register, identify who will receive the exemption and the provisions from which he or she will be exempt, the effective period for exemption, and the terms and conditions of the exemption. The agency will evaluate comments received before making a final decision that also will be published in the Federal Register. Likewise, denied exemption requests will

appear in the Federal Register with the reasons for rejection.

An immediate revocation will occur if an individual fails to comply with the terms and conditions of the exemption; the exemption has resulted in a lower level of safety than before granting of the

'A final decision will be issued within 180 days of receiving a completed application.'

exemption, or continuation of the exemption becomes inconsistent with the goals of the regulations.

The FMCSA diabetes exemption process has three components. The first is a screening to identify qualified applicants. This process examines the applicant's experience and safety in operating commercial vehicles with insulin-treated diabetes, the history of hypoglycemia, and the results of examinations by medical specialists.

One important requirement in the screening process will be that

applicants have three years of safe commercial vehicle driving experience while using insulin. The second component provides guidelines for managing diabetes while operating a bus or truck, including supplies to be used and the protocol for monitoring and maintaining appropriate blood glucose levels.

The last component specifies the FMCSA's process for monitoring insulin-treated commercial drivers. It addresses the required medical examinations and the schedule for their submission. It indicates how glucose measures should be taken and reviewed, and how episodes of severe hypoglycemia and accidents should be reported.

The FMCSA's decision to establish an exemption process is based on a number of factors including studies of the effects of insulin-treated diabetes on driver performance and substantial medical input from a panel of endocrinologists.

Those applying for an exemption must send a request and documentation by letter to the FMCSA Diabetes Exemption Program, 400 Seventh Street, S.W., Washington, DC 20590. The FMCSA will issue a final decision within 180 days of receiving a completed application, and during that time will assess the potential safety performance of each applicant.

Greyhound Canada workers approve new labor accord

CALGARY, Alberta — Third time was the charm for members of the Amalgamated Transit Union Local 1374, which ratified a new, four-year labor contract with Greyhound Canada Transportation Corp.

Twice the union rejected contract offers from Greyhound Canada but on the third vote last month they approved the proposal.

The ATU represents 1,423 active Greyhound employees and Greyhound Courier Express owner/operators in the Canadian provinces of British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and northern Ontario.

The contract goes into effect immediately and is retroactive to Jan. 1, meaning employees will be getting a bonus check.

Greyhound said the agreement allows the company to focus all its energies on the business: passenger service, charters and courier express, and to respond to the needs of drivers, maintenance, terminal and technical employees and owner/operators.

"We wish to thank the membership for their support and the negotiating committees for their hard

work," said Len Munter, president and business agent of ATU 1374. "Without either, we could not have ratified this contract."

Added Greyhound Senior Vice President Dave Leach: "Greyhound and ATU leadership have worked hard over the past year to come to the agreement. We are pleased with the results of the membership vote."

Three principal groups of employees are impacted by the agreement — drivers, terminal employees and maintenance workers. Drivers get a 1 percent raise this year and next, and 2 percent raises in years three and four. The top rate today for drivers is 6 to 6.42 cents (Canadian) per mile.

For terminal employees, the increases are 2 percent this year and next, and 3 percent raises in years three and four. The top hourly rate for a ticket clerk today is \$16.85 (Canadian).

For maintenance employees, the raises are bigger. Mechanics get a 3.5 percent raise this year, 2 percent in years two and three, and 3.5 percent in year four. The top hourly rate for a maintenance technician today is \$22.34 (Canadian).

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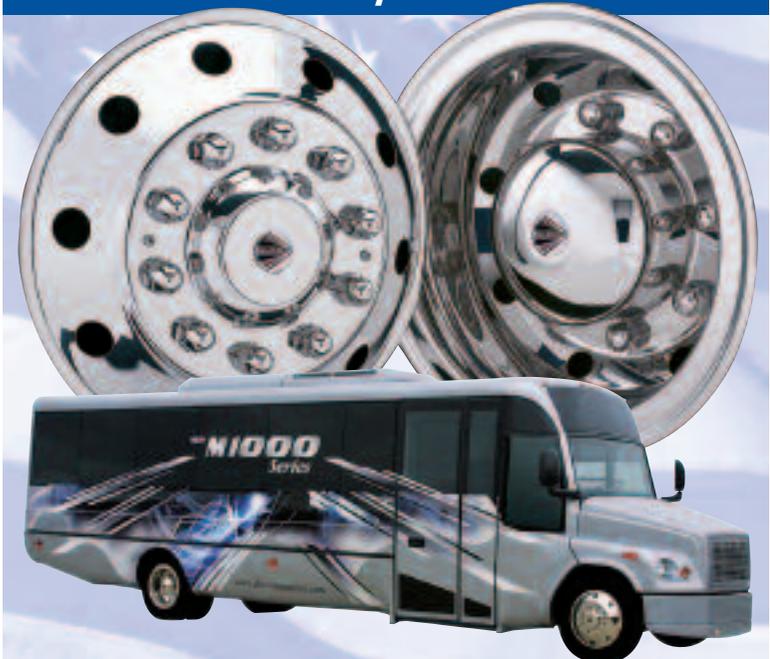
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Web auction is called success

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Seventy-five buses of most every type and description went on the auction block last month in what may have been the largest sale of its kind conducted in the coach industry.

The heavily publicized "Public Webcast Auction" featured coaches, shuttles and midsize buses being liquidated as part of the sale of Columbus-based Greenlawn Transit and Bus One Inc., as well as repossessions and turnbacks owned by CIT Equipment Finance, and surplus buses being sold by others.

The auction was conducted simultaneously via the Internet and at the Westin Great Southern Hotel in Columbus by one of the nation's largest asset management and disposition firms, Great American Group of Woodland Hills, Calif.

Great American conducts asset liquidations across the U.S. for an assortment of high-profile clients. Its current list of liquidations includes sales for Joann Fabrics & Crafts, Spiegel Inc., and Fleming Foods, the former giant food supplier to Kmart.

While the sale was considered a success by the principals it nevertheless disappointed, doubtlessly reflecting among other things the weak resale market in the coach industry and the fact many of the buses being sold were from second- or third-tier suppliers.

The buses and coaches being sold by Philip Schaeffing III, president of Greenlawn Transit and Bus One, accounted for roughly one-third of those available at the auction. Schaeffing said the sale didn't turn out as well as he had hoped, with buses selling cheaper than he expected. Schaeffing has sold his coach businesses, minus any buses, to Croswell Bus Lines of Williamsburg, Ohio. (See story on page 3.)

Schaeffing's view of the sale was echoed by Bert Jones, who coordinated the sale for Great American Group.

"It went pretty good," he said. "It's never good enough. You just have to accept what you get."



The Bus One and Greenlawn Transit fleets, composed primarily of Setra coaches, were sold in the auction.

Jones pulled together buses from across the U.S. for the sale. In fact, while many of the buses were available for inspection in the yard of Greenlawn Transit and Bus One in Columbus, others were at 19 different locations stretching from California to Florida.

The oldest bus being sold was a 1975 Prevost LeMirage and the newest were 2000 model Blue Bird LTC-40s. Six newer LTC-40s ended up being auctioned.

There was a large assortment of cutaways, ranging from a 1986 Ford E-350, to a 2000 Krystal Koach F-550 20-passenger shuttle. A large percentage of the midsize buses were from rental car fleets, including nearly 20 Metrotrans Eurotrans shuttles.

There also were five school buses, plus a small assortment of rag-tag junked, crashed and burned buses.

The auction included a one-time celebrity bus. Lot No. 1 was a 1997 Setra S217 HDH, 58-passenger tour coach that was featured at the Setra stand on the floor of the 1997 Motorcoach Expo in Charlotte, N.C. The bus has a striking cosmic livery of planets and stars. Schaeffing had purchased the bus secondhand a few years ago from a friend.



Croswell

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

combination of J-4500 and D-4500 models.

Croswell intends to make a splash in Columbus with an updated fleet and will market the newly acquired businesses under its own name.

As part of its marketing program, Croswell positions its fleet front and center. Its Web and printed material touts the company's VIP series coaches, European touring coaches, lounge coaches, standard seated coaches and mini-

coaches. Some of the buses have galleys and card tables.

The company will even modify its equipment for long tours with custom interiors and exterior graphics. The Croswell Web site features a photo of a company coach with "Cincinnati Bearcats" emblazoned on the side. The Bearcats are from the University of Cincinnati.

Croswell's services include charters, local sightseeing, airport transfers, convention and meeting services, preformed group tours and retail tours. It also has an affiliated tour company.

Croswell is a shareholder of the International Motor Coach Group, the marketing organization of independent operators.

As part of the move to sell their businesses, the Schaeffings closed down Buckeye Bus Co., which operated a fleet of school buses.

Phil Schaeffing is undecided on his future. He intends to relax for a spell before charting a new direction. He will assist Croswell for a period but he signed a two-year, non-compete agreement as part of the sale, so he won't be re-entering the coach business in Columbus anytime soon.

Touring, tour bus parking are made easier in Boston

BOSTON — Touring Boston's famous Freedom Trail has gone high tech.

Visitors to Boston's historic district can rent lightweight digital players that guide them along the 2-1/2-mile Freedom Trail tour that links 16 sites. The hand-held, state-of-the-art audio players contain a two-hour narrative called "Hear Freedom!"

The devices are designed to liberate sightseers from traditional follow-along tours that take groups from the Boston Common to the Charlestown waterfront.

According to the Freedom Trail Foundation, the 50-year-old nonprofit group dedicated to promoting and preserving Boston's historic character and role in the U.S. revolution, the new system is the first outdoor citywide audio tour of its kind. It was produced for the foundation by the same people who created audio tours of the U.S. Air and Space Museum in Washington, the Louvre in Paris, Alcatraz, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and others.

Sound effects, character voices, celebrities and historians are featured on the audio tour. Individuals can start or finish anywhere on the trail, and listen to each segment as often — or as little — as they like.

Historical information about the Freedom Trail is balanced with colorful commentary about some of Boston's history since the Revolution.

The audio players and headsets can be picked up at the Greater Boston Convention & Visitors Bureau Visitor Information Center. Credit card is the only accepted form of payment. The first rental is \$12 and each additional rental is \$10. Group rates

Devil's Highway gets new designation

GALLUP, N.M.—A new name is needed for the Devil's Highway.

U.S. 666, often called "the Devil's Highway," has gotten a new designation: U.S. 491.

In the Bible, the Book of Revelation says 666 is the "number of the beast" and that usually is interpreted as Satan, leading to the name Devil's Highway.

The highway runs north from Gallup to Cortez, Colo., where it jogs northwest into Utah, terminating at Monticello. Distance: 194 miles of what used to be a bad road.

and special discounts are available. Call (617) 227-8800 for more information.

To help coach tour operators get around Boston easier and more quickly, the Boston Transportation

Department has published a new tour bus parking map.

The map has a number of features, including:

- Tour bus drop-off and pick-up locations

- Long-term coach parking locations

- City tour bus regulations

- Contact information for operators

To obtain a copy of the map,

call (617) 635-3076, or send an e-mail requesting a copy to: access-boston@cityofboston.gov. A viewable copy of the map can be found at: www.cityofboston.gov/transportation/tour_bus.asp.

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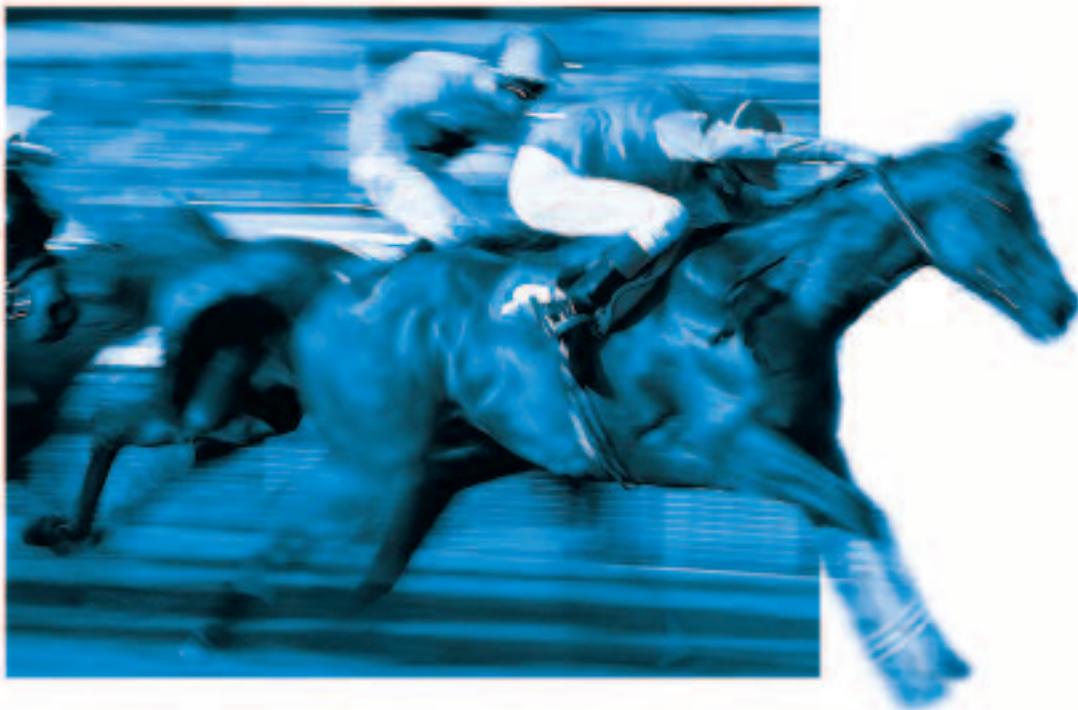
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