

Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE BUS INDUSTRY

Operators beware: Ghosts could be haunting your ELDs

The federal electronic logging device mandate is visiting haunting apparitions upon motorcoaches — ghost codes that can shut down engines, jam transmissions or welcome hackers on board.

“A lot of things can happen with ghost codes caused by ELD devices,” said Louis Hotard, director of technical service for ABC Companies in Winter Garden, Fla.

“The biggest complaint we are hearing today is about ghost power-train codes that can shut the bus off and cause transmissions not to shift correctly.

“Sometimes you can unplug the ELD, restart the coach and it will run fine. Then in four or five hours the problem will come back,” Hotard said.

ABC is the North American dis-

tributor of Van Hool motorcoaches.

“We have heard it has been a challenge for the operators,” said JP Pelletier, vice president of engineering for Motor Coach Industries in Winnipeg. “There are numerous systems on the market and there are not really any standards in terms of how these systems are designed.

“All of these systems are

self-certified so they go on the list as approved, based on the supplier or manufacturer making the statement it is a compliant device,” Pelletier said.

The modern motorcoach is a finely tuned electronic device that also happens to carry an engine, transmission and people. The linked computerization of devices evolved along with the complexity

of drive train control systems, heating and ventilation, lighting and passenger comforts such as Wi-Fi and USB ports, Hotard said.

“There are so many functions you want to have done on the coach, without the multiplexing you would have tons of wire and more mechanical relays. When you turn on the headlights, there

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Motorcoach mechanics are the ‘unsung heroes’ of the industry

Dave Myerhofer’s experience, dedication and pride carried him to his second national championship in the UMA Maintenance Competition at Motorcoach Expo 2018 in San Antonio.

His scores on written and hands-on diagnostic tests had to excel — he was competing against other former champions.

“I’ve been working on buses for 29 years with the same company. It’s something I fell in love with. I take pride in the buses and feel like they are mine,” said Myerhofer, who turns wrenches and runs computer diagnostics at Kobussen Trailways in Kaukauna, Wis.

Myerhofer was awarded a trophy and check for \$2,500 from the Maintenance Competition sponsor, ABC Companies. ABC Executive Vice President and COO Roman Cornell, who presented the trophy and check at the UMA Leadership Awards celebration, said motorcoach mechanics are “the unsung heroes of our industry.”

The first runner-up was Greg Lammers of Cavalier Coaches in Owatonna, Minn., who received \$1,000 and a trophy. Second runner-up Peter Haunold of Royal Highway Tours in Fairbanks, Alaska, received \$500 and a trophy.

Myerhofer elicited a roar of

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14 ►



Dave Myerhofer, who turns wrenches and runs computer diagnostics at Kobussen Trailways in Kaukauna, Wis., says his dedication and pride carried him to his second national championship in the UMA Maintenance Competition earlier this year.

Tourism strong 19 months after deadly Pigeon Forge fire

PIGEON FORGE, Tenn. — Tourism continues growing since fires burned the outskirts of this popular motorcoach destination in eastern Tennessee in fall 2016, sparing attractions but razing the homes of many of the area’s workers.

The area around Gatlinburg, six miles up U.S. Highway 321 from Pigeon Forge, was harder hit, although its major attractions

along its main street, the Parkway, were not damaged either.

The fire claimed 12 lives, another died of a heart attack and another in a vehicle fleeing the blaze, and 191 were injured. Tennessee Gov. Bill Haslam called the fire “the worst in a century in Tennessee.”

More than 2,460 structures were damaged or destroyed, according to coverage of the fire in

local newspapers.

Since Bus & Motorcoach News last checked in on the region a year ago (see the July 1, 2017, issue), new attractions have opened and more are on the way as the area, a gateway to Great Smoky Mountains National Park, continues to deliver on its promise of adding something new each year — bolstering a destination known as the home of Dollywood theme

park and myriad other features, from food to shows, rides, shopping, music and museums.

The area’s attractions and friendliness make it a popular destination for motorcoach tours and charters.

“Our supplier partners that we have here are all experienced in working with the motorcoach groups and they just bend over backwards with Southern hospi-

tality,” said Kay Poole, sales manager for the Pigeon Forge Department of Tourism and a certified travel industry specialist.

“The tour operators love it here, they love working with our suppliers in town and they know that we are excited to have their groups come visit,” Poole said.

Ed Tonahill, group tour director for Crown Coach Corp. in

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MCI's all-electric J4500e completes phase one testing

DES PLAINES, Ill. — Motor Coach Industries' all-electric J4500e prototype successfully completed its phase one testing.

MCI said the coach ran flawlessly at both low and high speeds up to a sustained 70 mph on the highway.

The J4500e coach is on schedule for January 2020 production and orders are being taken now.

The electric architecture incorporated in the MCI J4500e features a high-torque Siemens 2130 LB FT electric drive system with a planned range to meet long-distance applications, and a Nickel Manganese Cobalt (NMC) battery at 450 kWh with high-power plug-in battery charging to 100 percent in under three hours.

MCI also will apply its battery-electric platform to the D45 CRT LE commuter coach followed by the electric 35-foot MCI J, giving operators the most comprehensive choices in all-electric coaches.

"We're enormously pleased by these early test results — our all-electric J4500e delivered smooth power across varied roadways and impressive results in acceleration, handling and ride quality," said JP



Motor Coach Industries' all-electric J4500e prototype ran flawlessly at both low and high speeds up to a sustained 70 mph on the highway during recent testing. The coach is on schedule for January 2020 production

Pelletier, vice president of MCI engineering.

Pelletier said the electric motor lessens interior cabin noise, increasing passenger comfort. The J4500e regenerative braking, specifically designed to feel like the brakes on a clean-diesel coach, also performed as intended.

"MCI has covered electric territory before with hybrid diesel-electric coaches built in the early 2000s that are still in service, but with the all-electric platform,

we're benefitting from (MCI parent) New Flyer's longtime battery-electric low-floor transit expertise," he said.

MCI President Ian Smart said that because of New Flyer's and MCI's complementary experience in electric, "MCI is set to offer the most reliable, comfortable, efficient and passenger-friendly electric coaches to private and public operators anywhere in North America."

MCI will now move its J4500e test to northern California, where

public and private operators are eyeing all-electric expansion for their key customers. Major Silicon Valley technology employers are expanding their own private coach shuttle systems attractive to millennial workforces, and success in that market requires a deep understanding of how employer operators will be using these coaches.

"The time-tested reliability of the J4500 coach matched to an all-electric powertrain and charging methods adopted from New Flyer

battery electric Xcelsior Charge is a powerful benefit — we're able to closely collaborate with customers to provide the optimal electric propulsion and charging solution based on their exact usage and scheduling needs," said Patrick Scully, MCI executive vice president of sales and marketing.

The support grid for MCI's all-electric product line includes more than 24 field support experts; seven MCI Sales and Service Centers across the U.S. and Canada; the MCI Academy — the company's expanding online and hands-on technical training department; and NFI Parts, where operators have access to MCI and New Flyer original equipment parts along with parts for most other makes and models.

"The electric future at MCI is in line with our overall objectives of building low-cost-of-operation and easy-to-service models," Smart said. "MCI's proven coaches combined with New Flyer's battery-electric Xcelsior Charge expertise will pave the way for vehicle reliability and help our customers make a smooth transition to electric."



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THE DOCKET

FHWA plans meetings about impact of automated vehicles

WASHINGTON — The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has launched a series of meetings designed to gather information about integrating automated vehicles into the nation's road network.

The National Dialogue on Highway Automation will focus on the potential of automated vehicles to significantly transform the nation's roadways and the uncertainty they will cause for the agencies responsible for the planning, design, construction, operation and maintenance of the roadway infrastructure.

A series of meetings beginning in June and running through the end of 2018 will be held across the country to facilitate information sharing, identify key issues and prepare the infrastructure and the broader transportation community to safely and efficiently integrate automated vehicles into the road network.

Input received during the Na-

tional Dialogue will help inform national research, policy and programs and will aid in the development of a national transportation community for automation.

The program will engage an expanded set of stakeholders, beyond FHWA's typical stakeholders, in order to ensure that this issue has broad input. These stakeholders will include original equipment manufacturers, technology suppliers, transportation network companies, associations and public-sector partners.

The meetings will last one to one and a half days and generally include 100 to 150 participants. These meetings are meant to gather input and information from stakeholders and will include significant interactive components, such as breakout discussions and listening sessions.

The objectives for the National Dialogue include gathering input from a broad group of stakehold-

ers on key issues, challenges and concerns in highway automation, such as infrastructure readiness, traffic operations, transportation planning and other topics impacted by automation.

The meetings also will facilitate information sharing between industry, public agencies and others to understand the current state of automated driving systems and roadway capabilities and inform FHWA actions.

Another goal is to update institutional structures for working with existing and new stakeholders and to aid in developing new partnerships and strengthening coordination channels between industry, associations, public agencies and other key groups.

FHWA also hopes to raise awareness of agency and U.S. Department of Transportation activities in automation and emerging technologies and to identify opportunities for strategic partner-

ships between federal activity and state, local, and industry activity.

Focus areas for the meetings include:

- **Planning and Policy:** This focus area will explore relevant issues for the planning and policy community, such as travel demand changes from automation, land-use implications, infrastructure funding, right-of-way use, transportation systems management and operations, automation legislation/policy and other topics.

- **Digital Infrastructure and Data:** This focus area will center on the data requirements and needs of automated vehicles (e.g., digital work zone maps, road closures). It will explore the possibility of developing new partnerships and collaboration between public agencies and industry for data sharing and safety.

- **Freight:** This focus area will deal with truck platooning applications and automated truck freight

delivery issues. It will cover possible implications on traffic patterns and operations, as well as potential infrastructure considerations.

- **Operations:** This focus area will survey the range of operations challenges from highway automation and initiate a discussion on what further research is necessary to address them.

- **Multimodal Safety and Infrastructure Design:** This focus area will cover infrastructure requirements, standardization and consistency for automation. It will highlight topics where automation technology developers and public agencies need collaboration to plan for locations where existing roadway infrastructure, road conditions, design features and environments could lead to potential safety hazards.

Information about upcoming meetings can be found at <https://ops.fhwa.dot.gov/automationdialogue/index.htm>.



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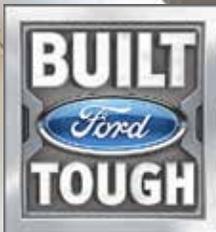


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OOIDA, safety groups oppose drivers younger than 21

GRAIN VALLEY, Mo. — The Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association, which represents small-business truckers, is opposed to allowing drivers younger than 21 to operate interstate commercial motor vehicles.

OOIDA, along with Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety and 12 other organizations, sent a letter to federal lawmakers urging them to oppose two House bills that would allow younger drivers to operate interstate CMVs.

The letter states that the impetus for the bills — a shortage of drivers — does not exist and points to statistics to support the fact

there are plenty of drivers for any future supply needed.

Most in the bus and trucking industries say they are facing an extreme driver shortage.

The letter also brings up a previous attempt to lower the age to 18 in 2001, which was rejected by federal regulators.

“This has been tried before and no one with any common sense thought it was a good idea,” said Todd Spencer, acting president of OOIDA.

The letter was sent to the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure and was signed by a

long list of diverse groups.

The groups are opposed to two specific legislative proposals that would allow teenagers to drive large trucks and buses: H.R. 5358, the Developing Responsible Individuals for a Vibrant Economy (DRIVE-Safe) Act, and H.R. 3889, the Waiving Hindrances to Economic Enterprise and Labor (WHEEL) Act.

The DRIVE-Safe Act would establish an apprenticeship program for anyone younger than 21 who has a commercial driver's license. The act would require a driver 21 or older to accompany the apprentice for two probation-

ary periods totaling 400 hours, including 240-plus hours of operating a CMV.

The WHEEL Act would alter eligibility requirements for the federal government's commercial driver pilot program, which is open only to workers 18 to 21 years old who are military or former military personnel, received specified heavy-vehicle driver training in the armed forces and are sponsored by a participating motor carrier.

The act would change those requirements to 18- to 21-year-olds who have a valid CDL and a clean driving record and who have com-

pleted a training program or similar qualification.

The letter points out that intrastate CMV drivers under the age of 19 are four times more likely to be involved in fatal crashes, and CMV drivers who are 19 to 20 years old are six times more likely to be involved in fatal crashes.

“We think it's irresponsible to put young kids behind the wheel of a truck in order to avoid addressing the real problems of high turnover,” Spencer said.

“The focus should instead be on fixing the staggering turnover rate with better pay and working conditions.”

Operation Safe Driver Week scheduled for July 15-21

GREENBELT, Md. — The Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance's 2018 Operation Safe Driver Week will take place July 15 to 21.

Traffic safety personnel will be on the lookout for unsafe driving behaviors by commercial motor vehicle drivers and passenger vehicle drivers as they work toward zero deaths on roadways.

Unsafe driver behaviors by CMV drivers and passenger vehicle drivers continue to be the lead-

ing cause of crashes. The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration's “Large Truck Crash Causation Study” cites driver behavior as the critical reason for more than 88 percent of large truck crashes and 93 percent of passenger vehicle crashes.

Examples of dangerous driver behaviors that enforcement personnel will be tracking throughout Operation Safe Driver Week are speeding, distracted driving, tex-

ting, failure to use a seatbelt while operating a CMV or in a passenger vehicle, following too closely, improper lane change, and failure to obey traffic control devices.

CVSA's Operation Safe Driver Program was created to help to reduce the number of crashes, deaths and injuries involving large trucks, buses and passenger vehicles due to unsafe driving behaviors. During Operation Safe Driver Week, there will be increased

CMV and passenger vehicle traffic enforcement.

Operation Safe Driver Week is sponsored by CVSA, in partnership with FMCSA and with support from industry and transportation safety organizations.

It aims to help improve the behavior of all drivers operating in an unsafe manner — either in or around CMVs — through educational and traffic enforcement strategies to address individuals

exhibiting high-risk driving behaviors.

To find out about Operation Safe Driver Week enforcement events going on in your area, contact the agency/department responsible for overseeing CMV safety within your jurisdiction. A list of agencies from around North America can be found at <https://cvsa.org/contactpage/contacts/law-enforcement-lead-agency-contacts/>.

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New transportation grants will replace TIGER program

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Transportation has announced a replacement for the Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grants.

DOT published a notice of funding opportunity for \$1.5 billion through the Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development discretionary grant, or BUILD, program.

Although BUILD will replace the TIGER program, it is similar. They both award grants a competitive basis to local or regional entities to fund roads, bridges, transit, rail, ports or intermodal transportation.

The last round of TIGER grants awarded about \$500 million to fund 41 projects in 43 states and territories.

“BUILD transportation grants will help communities revitalize

their surface transportation systems while also increasing support for rural areas to ensure that every region of our country benefits,” Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao said.

DOT said BUILD applicants will be assessed on the basis of safety, economic competitiveness, quality of life, environmental protection, innovation, partnership and additional nonfederal revenue for future transportation infrastructure investments.

A large share of the grants will be awarded to projects in rural areas, including for rural broadband deployment.

The Consolidate Appropriations Act of 2018 made \$1.5 billion available for BUILD grants through September 2020, the same amount as the TIGER grants.

The maximum grant award for

BUILD recipients is \$25 million, and no more than \$150 million can be awarded to a single state.

The BUILD grants require that at least 30 percent of funds must be awarded to projects in rural areas, but the secretary of trans-

portation is required to ensure an appropriate balance of addressing rural and urban needs.

National Association of Counties Executive Director Matthew Chase said the BUILD program will serve as another element to

the partnership between federal and local government agencies. Chase said that counties invest more than \$122 billion each year in infrastructure projects and own 46 percent of the nation’s roads and 38 percent of its bridges.

FTA announces up to \$84 million in transit-bus grants

WASHINGTON — The Federal Transit Administration is offering up to \$84.45 million in competitive grant funds through its Low or No Emission (Low-No) Bus Program.

The Low-No Program supports projects sponsored by local transit agencies to bring advanced, American-made bus technologies such as battery electric power and hydrogen fuel cells into service nationwide.

“One of Secretary (Elaine) Chao’s priorities is preparing for the future by engaging with new technologies to ensure safety, without hampering innovation,”

said FTA Acting Administrator K. Jane Williams.

“The Low-No program is an opportunity for transit agencies to utilize next-generation technologies as part of their bus systems while promoting American innovation and manufacturing.”

FTA will award the grants to eligible recipients, which include public transit agencies, state transportation departments and tribes, on a competitive basis. Projects will be evaluated by criteria such as the applicant’s demonstration of need, the project’s benefits, project implementation strategy and capacity for implementing the project.

New York, Iowa stepping up to fund infrastructure

With infrastructure funding stalled in Congress, a growing number of states are stepping up to develop their own plans for paying for road and bridge projects.

Two states that have recently focused on infrastructure funding are New York and Iowa.

In New York, Gov. Andrew Cuomo announced that an additional \$125 billion would go toward infrastructure investment over the next five years. That builds on Cuomo’s existing \$100 billion infrastructure initiative and will include state and federal funds as well as private sector capital.

“From building bridges to revitalizing our subway and rail systems, we have invested more in our infrastructure than any other administration, and now we must

take the next step forward with an additional \$125 billion commitment,” Cuomo said. “These efforts will improve travel and transportation, strengthen regional economies and increase our state’s competitiveness, and make New York stronger and more resilient for future generations.”

In Iowa, the state Department of Transportation presented a draft of the \$3.4 billion 2019-23 Transportation Improvement Program to the state Transportation Commission, which crafts transportation policy and identifies transportation needs.

The plan will fund interstate reconstruction projects in the western part of the state and widening of U.S. Route 20 across Iowa.

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Four ways to gather data, increase business

By Christian Riddell
Motorcoach Marketing Council



Big data is a big deal. Marketers around the globe have turned to data as a powerful ally in finding new customers and cross selling to existing ones.

Big data, an umbrella term that refers to all the data points available to marketers, includes everything from what you buy at the grocery store to what you watch on cable TV.

Almost everything we do these days has a digital footprint, and those footprints are, in most cases, available to marketers to try to decide if we're the perfect fit for their products or services.

While big data is a really popular buzzword in the marketing ecosystem, I believe that small data is the single most overlooked marketing tool in the motorcoach industry.

Small data, at least for the sake of this article, is the data that exists inside your business. You can track that data and use it to grow your business by consistently focusing on (and answering) four important questions.

1. What do your customers buy from you?

This may sound simple, and for the most part it is. Knowing what people buy from you is the first step in understanding how to sell more of it.

You don't just want to know that they bought a line-run ticket, a charter or a school bus move. You want to know what they did with it, what time of day they needed it and how often they may have that need in the future.

Imagine that you own a grocery store and you're trying to increase profits. The answer to growth wouldn't necessarily be to add more products or expand the size of the store. At some point, you have to utilize the shelf space you have to increase profit.

For example, you might notice that you have half an aisle devoted to pickled pigs feet, but you only sold 10 jars last month. In contrast, though you only sell two types of beef jerky, you moved hundreds of units in the last 30 days.

This data helps you replace product that isn't moving with product that is, thereby increasing your sales inside the confines of existing space.

We have the same opportunity in the motorcoach business. If you have a piece of equipment sitting or empty seats on a line run, that's your "existing shelf space" and you have to figure out what product to put in it.

In bus terms, the question is this: What type of customer are you most likely to talk to that will fill those empty seats? Perhaps you know that your line-run customers are primarily professionals in their 20s and 30s, or you're selling a lot of work to local businesses that need shuttles due to major road construction projects.

Intelligence-based selling allows you to market to the people who are most likely to be your customers by selling them a product you already know they're interested in.

2. How did a customer hear about you?

If you have ever read an article I have written, you know this is something near and dear to my heart. Why? BECAUSE IT MATTERS MORE THAN MOST THINGS A BUSINESS DOES!!! (Sorry, I get carried away sometimes.)

Most motorcoach operators I've worked with over the past 10 years employ some kind of a shotgun approach to marketing (throw it all against the wall and hope that enough of it sticks to pay the bills). Some do very little, others do a lot; some spend hardly anything on true marketing while others spend, spend and spend.

The one thing these operators have in common is that most of them don't know what's actually generating their results. Is it the ad running in the local magazine, the radio spot, the website, Google search, busrates.com, or something else they're doing?

They don't know, which means they're afraid to assess and refine the money spent on marketing. (What if they cut something that's actually generating results?)

So, the marketing budget grows year after year until someone comes in with a broad-stroke machete, hacking it apart while the owners clench their teeth, hold their breath and hope it doesn't hurt too bad.

Knowing how your customers found you gives you the super power to eliminate all of that nonsense, and it gives you the intelligence to spend less and do more.

And it makes sense, right? If nine of the 10 things you're doing aren't generating any results, you can stop spending money on them

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and, instead, invest it where you'll get a return.

This is something I've shared with countless operators. If you'll do this one thing, I promise you'll spend less and get more results than you're getting right now. (For the record, I have yet to have anyone prove me wrong on this.)

If you've ever made advertising decisions based solely on what you think, feel or believe, try this instead: Ask every single customer who calls you, regardless of whether they book or not, how they heard about you. Be as specific as you can and record the data.

You can't imagine how empowering it is to make decisions based on what you know is actually working.

3. When are you busy?

This should be a no brainer. Should be. You should have a color-coded calendar on your wall: green for days you want more business, yellow for days that are almost full and red for any days that are sold out.

Using a calendar system allows you to (eventually) have a working calendar for the current year and a forecast calendar from last year. As the years stack up, you'll be able to use those calendars to identify clear patterns, and those patterns can quickly be turned into bottom-line dollars.

This is simple supply-and-demand economics. On days when you traditionally have very little demand and an abundance of supply, you want to sharpen the pencil, get competitive with pricing and market more aggressively to those who traditionally consume your product during those times (see question 1).

On yellow days (or days that are traditionally yellow year after year), you want to limit discounting and consider peak-demand surcharges.

And on red days? They're your cash-money days. Don't discount or charge peak surcharge rates, and make sure you're only booking customers who pay on time and won't cancel at the last minute.

The calendar approach, along with the data from question 1, gives you the ability to fill up slow days and make busy days more

profitable. And it's probably the easiest way to increase bottom-line revenue.

Remember, this doesn't come from what you think, feel or remember. It comes from hard data.

4. Why did someone choose NOT to buy from you?

I went to a farmers market recently and bought a delicious watermelon that weighed 25 pounds. I probably walked by a dozen melon stands, and to an untrained eye they all looked exactly the same.

Many were handing out samples and calling potential customers into their booths, some claimed they had better melons than any of the other vendors and still others were offering discounts (one even had a two-for-one deal).

So how, you may wonder, did I choose where to buy my juicy, delicious, red-seeded watermelon? Simple. I chose the vendor closest to the parking lot. (Because who wants to carry a watermelon that heavy a quarter of a mile to the car?)

I imagine that once the market closed at the end of the day, vendors talked about ways they could sell more next time (reduce the cost, offer a three-for-one deal, give away bigger samples, etc.).

The expensive vendors may have thought they didn't sell as many melons because of price, or maybe they wondered if there was a quality issue. But here's the thing: I bet none of them considered that proximity to the parking lot could be the ultimate buying factor.

We do this same thing in the bus business all the time. We see the difference between the charter quotes we send out and the business we actually book, and then make the same assumptions the watermelon vendors were likely making. ("It must have been price. Maybe our equipment is too old. They must not like our drivers. If only we could sell at more of a discount, we would fill up those dispatch sheets.")

But often, like the melon vendors, we're just plain wrong.

Reaching out to customers to ask for the sale after issuing a charter quote or ticket price for a line run is good business. I don't think anyone can debate that.

But the few companies that do that often stop when it comes to being told they didn't get the work, and that's unfortunate. One of the most important pieces of small data available to any company is the follow-up question: "May I ask why you decided to book with our

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Bureaucrats know nothing about effective regulation

By Dave Millhouser



“I know NOTHING!”

You may think I’m talking about myself, but actually it’s a quote from a character in “Hogan’s Heroes,” an iconic 1960’s sitcom.

Sergeant Schultz was a Nazi guard at a WWII prisoner of war camp. Did I mention it was a comedy?

Schultz was a favorite of the scheming prisoners because he was easily scammed. When they couldn’t trick him, it wasn’t difficult to bribe him with Hershey Bars — he weighed 325 pounds.

Part of his shtick was that he obeyed orders literally, regardless of whether they made sense. When things went awry and the happy throng of prisoners made the camp’s leaders look foolish, he whined “I know NOTHING!”

Over the years I’ve been disrespectful to regulators and bureaucrats. This is a bit of a mea culpa (a smidgen of Latin to make me look smart).

In some ways they’re caught in the same trap as poor Sergeant Schultz, compelled to promulgate and enforce rules that often make no sense, imposing Draconian solutions on sometimes non-existent problems.

On the rare occasion when they admit things aren’t working as planned, they point to the lawmakers who either wrote, or authorized, the regulations and utter the immortal words “I’m just following the rules” (bureaucratic speak for “I know NOTHING”).

And they are, to an extent, right. Should they dare to do things differently, or use common sense, they might befoul the bureaucracy, which thrives on mindless consistency.

A wizened bus industry executive recently chastised me, pointing out that it wasn’t fair to blame a robot if it was programmed incorrectly. We should be taking a closer look at where the silliness starts.

Some of you read this column and say, “Who writes this nonsense?” We might want to redirect that sentiment to the current steaming pile of regulations.

Lawmakers either write them

or authorize regulators to do it. There seem to be at least three forces at work as rules are written.

First is the politics. Every time there is a visible problem, politicians feel they must “do something.” It has to be quick because the public’s attention span is measured in nanoseconds, and it has to be visible because the real goal is re-election.

Nothing says it has to be a comprehensive, or even effective, solution. It just has to look good on Twitter.

After the Bluffton accident the political pressure to mandate seatbelts was overwhelming. (Ironic because this was the kind of crash where seatbelts would have done more harm than good).

Seatbelts may be effective, but isn’t it possible they should be part of a comprehensive scheme? For decades our industry grunted, but never tested, “compartmentalization.” We eventually got a regulatory slap. Some of the onus is on us.

A school bus driver just burned to death when he couldn’t get his belt off. One misguided soul thought the lesson is that we need better physical exams for drivers

so they’d be strong enough to unbuckle.

A broad safety scheme would consider what happens when a coach full of buckled-in seniors catches fire.

A really comprehensive study would have taken too long for the election cycle. We live in a republic because the founders knew that pure democracy was too impulsive. Elected officials should offer thoughtful leadership rather than dashing to the front of the regulatory lynch mob.

The second force is the industry itself. The Big Guys have figured out that extensive regulation can drive smaller competitors out of business and provide cover when things go bad. They can afford their own lobbyists to influence legislation to their benefit.

When events turn poop, they whine, “I’m just following the rules.” They were in compliance with regulations that they helped write (or bury).

That, by the way, only works sometimes. Civil juries don’t always bite.

In third place, sadly, is the genuine desire to solve real problems.

Too often this one is abused by the first two, and is used to push through misguided mandates.

So much of what we THINK we know turns out to be wrong that a little humility might be in order. One generation’s common sense is often the next generation’s punch line.

Regulations shouldn’t be written by politicians chasing votes, Big Guys seeking protection in the guise of safety, bureaucrats searching for relevance, or grieving relatives wanting something “good” to come quickly out of “their” tragedy.

They ought to be the result of long-term comprehensive studies that we, as an industry, should support.

Instead, in the current age, they’re often reaction to Twitter feeds masquerading as facts. Both the industry and the regulators should be ashamed that, to the best of my knowledge, there has only been one modern “crash test” of a full-sized motorcoach in the U.S.

Collectively we don’t know too much more than Sergeant Schultz.

Dave Millhouser is a bus industry marketing consultant and freelance writer. Contact him by email at Davemillhouser@gmail.com.



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European company FlixBus using local operators in U.S.

LOS ANGELES — Five years after its launch in Europe, long-distance, low-fare bus company FlixBus has hit the road in the United States.

American travelers are now able to purchase FlixBus tickets on major routes in the Southwest, including service to Las Vegas from Los Angeles, Phoenix and San Diego.

Fares on some routes are as low as \$2.99 one way.

FlixBus is the brainchild of three young entrepreneurs, Jochen Engert, Daniel Krauss and André Schwämmlein, who wanted to develop a new means of travel that was a blend of tech-startup, e-commerce and traditional transportation.

Based on this concept, FlixBus was launched in Germany in 2013 with a business model in which the company manages the technology, ticketing, customer service, network planning, marketing and



sales, while its local partners are responsible for the daily operation of buses.

“Our business model has revolutionized the way people view — and utilize — buses in Europe, and we are excited to offer this fresh take on bus travel to people in the United States,” said Schwämmlein, CEO of FlixBus.

“We harness technology to create a better experience for travelers, with the goal of providing smart and green mobility for everyone to experience the world —

and we do all of it without owning a single bus.”

For phase one of the U.S. launch, 180 initial FlixBus connections are being operated by six regional bus partners: Arrow Stage Lines, American Explorer Motorcoach, Gray Line Arizona, Pacific Coachways and Transportation Charter Services — all members of the United Motorcoach Association — and USA Coach Services.

FlixBus plans to add another 400 connections in phase two.

“The FlixBus model allows us to focus on the daily operation of our buses — something we have over 30 years of experience doing — and puts the technology and marketing in the hands of the experts at FlixBus,” said Terry Fischer, president of Transportation Charter Services in Orange, Calif.

“FlixBus provides companies such as TCS a new business opportunity, and we’re looking forward to growing together through this partnership,” Fischer said. “It’s a smart way to operate, which

ultimately benefits the customer.”

With its U.S. launch, FlixBus hopes to encourage more people to park their cars and choose a more sustainable form of transportation. On top of buses being the most environmentally friendly form of public transportation available, FlixBus passengers can choose to offset their carbon emissions by purchasing “CO2 Compensation” tickets, thereby making a voluntary environmental contribution.

“In the United States, we want to show people who take their cars on long-haul drives that the bus can provide a convenient alternative, one that allows them to work, relax or sleep while they travel,” Schwämmlein said. “You can easily fall asleep in LA and wake up in front of Caesar’s Palace in Las Vegas if you want. Travel can and should be simple and accessible to everyone.”

Marketing Minute

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

competitors?”

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never thought possible. You won’t have to give away melons, provide samples or offer discounts. Instead, you can address the real issue and move your booth closer to the parking lot!

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foundation you can use to radically improve your business. But like any data, gathering it is only the beginning of the battle.

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inform how you spend marketing dollars, when and how you discount, what you charge and whom you market to.

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gather and use small data in your business, you’ll sell more charters, to more people, for more money.

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ELD security

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

isn't a switch on the dash that turns on the headlights — you told the computer to turn on the headlights," he said.

"The computer turns the inside lights on and off, handles the stability control and cruise control and tells the engine and transmission what to do."

The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration ELD mandate for trucks and motorcoaches became effective on Dec. 18, 2017, to improve tracking of drivers' hours of service and records of duty status. Due to issues operators were facing in equipping thousands of vehicles with ELDs, the administration delayed full enforcement until April 1.

The sudden shock of injecting the new device into delicate multiplex systems, some nearly two decades old, has prompted a lot of allergic reactions.

"This may be the first time people are hooking things into the multiplex system of the coach. It is not a plug-and-play operation," Hotard said.

There are international standards for the basic electronic connection device, the J1939 diagnos-

tic port, and the operating system, the controller area network (CAN), that ELD devices use to monitor and track vehicle operations.

"The devices are communicating with our CAN network. That alone gets our attention," Pelletier said. "If the devices are not installed correctly, that catches our attention. If someone makes a decision to splice into the OEM wiring made by any manufacturer, not just MCI, that really gets our attention."

The multiplexed systems were not designed with plans for ELD devices to stick their noses into vehicle management systems. The electronic controls don't even like it when something tries to steal a bit of electricity.

"One guy tried to hook a radio into the power line for the CAN," Hotard said, and created a lot of problems on the coach.

Differing demands

ELD manufacturers also have faced challenges in adapting to the differing demands of trucks and motorcoaches, as well as differences between older and newer coaches. There are 371 self-certified ELDs registered with FMCSA.

"Trucks operate on 12-volt

systems, motorcoaches on 24 volts," Hotard said. "If the ELD provider is catering to both markets they need to handle both. Some of the ELDs made for trucks are not necessarily for motorcoaches."

Motorcoaches also differ over model years, partly because newer systems operate at higher data transfer speeds.

"A 2018 vehicle might have a different issue than a 2005," Hotard said. "Because of the 20-year useful life of buses, a customer might have different versions of multiplex — or even no multiplex — on buses from the same manufacturer."

Motorcoach manufacturers cannot design accommodations for 371 ELDs, Pelletier said.

"Frankly, it is not possible for us to install, test and evaluate every one of those devices in any short period of time," he said. "Ideally, the entire industry would use one device and we could ensure that that device functions flawlessly with our vehicles."

Although FMCSA has said it will remove any unworkable ELDs from its registry, its listing currently identifies none as revoked.

The manufacturers of motorcoaches and ELDs are working

on fixes for the ghosts.

"A lot of ELD manufacturers are having to tweak their systems," Hotard said. "Most bus manufacturers have adapted specific plugs for the ELD so it can extract data without screwing up the rest of the bus. We are providing a dedicated plug just for the ELD. It is called a gateway module — it allows the ELD to read data from the CAN line but protects the CAN line from faulty data from the ELD."

"We work with each individual customer and model and help them, whether it is programming or equipment. Sometimes we have to work with the ELD provider," he said. "Operators should be aware that they should consult their bus manufacturer when they hook stuff up so they can get a clean way to install it."

Scrutinize suppliers

Pelletier advised operators to select electronic device suppliers carefully.

"Pick a system that you have some confidence in and a manufacturer that is going to be around for the long-term," he said. "Have confidence that it will meet your requirements. Don't necessarily buy the one that costs the least."

ELDs do not meet basic cyber-

security standards and could give hackers access to vehicle operations at the control module interface or over cellular telephone connections that transmit data, the National Motor Freight Traffic Association has warned its members.

"As far as NMFTA has been able to ascertain, the current ELD rule, as written and implemented, requires both two-way CAN bus connectivity and Internet connectivity," the association stated.

"This creates some genuine concern regarding the cybersecurity posture of the ELD devices themselves as they create a bridge between the Internet and the CAN bus network of the vehicle."

"If the ELD devices could be exploited to send malicious traffic to the vehicle CAN bus, it could have serious consequences to the safe operation of the vehicle. While existing and proven device manufacturers hold the majority of the ELD market, the new mandate has brought a number of new entrants into the market hoping to capitalize on the opportunity."

NMFTA cited a cybersecurity expert's analysis that ELD systems it tested "did very little to nothing at all to follow cybersecurity best practices and were open to compromise."



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Pigeon Forge

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Memphis, concurs.

“I’d have to say they and Branson (Mo.) are probably the two friendliest destinations out there,” Tonahill said. “They just like to see people come and enjoy their area and it is a beautiful scenic area,” especially during the fall colors that typically peak around mid-October.

Friendliness, fun and beauty sell, and visitors have returned in droves since the fires. Amusement, lodging and restaurant gross revenues are up a combined 12 percent in the first quarter of 2018 from the same period last year, according to Pigeon Forge Department of Tourism figures. And that follows a record 2017 in terms of gross revenue for the city.

“We show no residual effects from the fires of 2016,” Poole said. “In fact, everything is just booming here. Pigeon Forge has a lot of new things coming in.”

They include a new Tru by Hilton opening in July, which follows the opening of a Home 2 Suites by Hilton last year, Poole said. They’re part of a new, 174-acre entertainment and retail development called The Mountain Mile & Tower



Pigeon Forge, Tenn., home of Dollywood theme park and myriad other features, from food to shows, rides, shopping, music and museums, has seen tourism rise since a deadly fire in November 2016.

Shops that’s under construction.

It will include a new thrill ride, the 200-foot-tall “Mountain Monster,” with three rides from the tower overlooking the Smoky Mountains.

A new attraction that opened in March is Pigeon Forge Snow, a 35,000-square-foot indoor snow-tubing facility offering 15 lanes of tubing on real snow, Poole said. The attraction says it’s the first indoor snow facility in the U.S. offering real snow year-round — in a comfortable, climate-controlled environment.

Also new: a high-diving hillbilies show and competitive long-jumping canines in the Hatfield and McCoy Dinner Feud per-

formance. A \$3 million renovation to the Hatfield and McCoy theater added a 24-foot-deep Olympic diving pool into which hillbilly divers from the Hatfield and McCoy clans take the plunge in the new water scene of the dinner feud.

“The hillbilly performers spring from diving boards that are high above the stage to see which family can win the diving competition,” a tourism department release states. “The water scene also incorporates a new rain curtain that pours water on the performers to add the dramatic effect of a ‘feuding storm’ in the theater.”

Also, athletic dogs leap across the new pool to retrieve a toy or stick, adding an additional twist to

the show, which includes comedy, music, clogging, singing and acrobatics.

The tourism department also touts new 2018 attractions that include:

- iLuminate, DRUMLine and speed painter Dan Dunn at Dollywood’s Summer Celebration, and TobyMac and Crowder at the park’s annual Rock the Smokies event on Aug. 25

- Crave Golf Club, a \$7 million sweet-themed golf destination featuring a 36-hole multilevel facility spanning 18,500 square feet plus a candy shop and gourmet milkshake bar

- What’s billed as the world’s largest replica of the RMS Titanic

on display at the Titanic Museum Attraction and built from 56,000 LEGO bricks — a 25-foot-long project conceived and constructed by Brynjar Karl Birgisson, a 10-year-old autistic boy

- The new Lumberjack Feud Show featuring world-class athleticism and high-energy competition along with audience participation, and a 104-room Margaritaville Island Inn

A Fairfield by Marriott hotel is opening next year, Poole said.

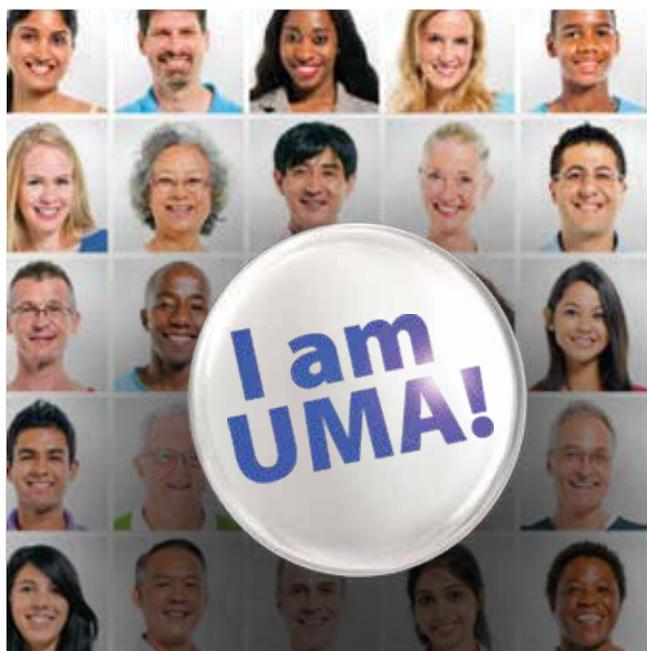
Pigeon Forge and neighboring Gatlinburg and Sevierville get a lot of visitors on their way to and from Great Smoky Mountains National Park, which last year was again the most visited national park, with 11.34 million visitors who spent about \$923 million in gateway communities, she said. The visitation was up about 0.2 percent from 2016, again setting a new record.

Pigeon Forge has about 6,000 permanent residents, but gets more than 9 million visitors a year, Poole said.

Also helping fuel tourism has been the 232,000-square-foot Le-Conte Event Center that opened in 2013 and attracts religious conferences, trade shows and competitions.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 13 ►

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UNITED MOTORCOACH ASSOCIATION

ABA, MCI partner to create driver-of-the-year award

WASHINGTON — The American Bus Association has partnered with Motor Coach Industries to create a new motorcoach driver of the year award.

The award will recognize an individual who has gone above and beyond the performance of his or her duties as an over-the-road motorcoach driver, professionally executing safe motorcoach operation while providing the traveling public with the safest form of passenger transportation in the United States.

The award will be presented during ABA's 2019 Annual Meet-

ing & Marketplace in Louisville next January.

"Motorcoach drivers are the face and backbone of our industry," said ABA President and CEO Peter Pantuso. "They deliver millions of passengers safely each year to their destinations providing the utmost in customer service."

"They are truly the representatives of our member companies," Pantuso said. "People always remember their driver and the experience they had with them on a trip."

MCI Vice President of Marketing and Product Planning Brent

Maitland said driver recognition is long overdue.

"There are many critical factors in creating a great experience for the passenger, starting with the quality, design and maintenance of the vehicle they are riding in," Maitland said. "But none is more important than the driver. Their passion for safety, equipment care and overall passenger care keeps our industry rolling."

The award has five benchmarks to judge nominees. Each nominee must:

- Be employed as an over-the-road motorcoach driver by an ABA

member (full or part-time)

- Have a minimum of 10 years cumulative experience driving an over-the-road motorcoach

- Not have any felony convictions

- Not have had any driving violations in the past three years, excluding form and manner violations

- Not have had a chargeable accident for a minimum of 10 years, not including non-chargeable incidents or incidental accidents (bumpers, mirrors)

Nominations with supporting documents must be received to the

Bus Industry Safety Council by Sept. 30, 2018. Completed nomination forms can be emailed to bisc@buses.org.

"The motorcoach industry is known for being the safest form of transportation on America's highways," said Al Smith, chair of ABA's Bus Industry Safety Council.

"This is a direct result of our extraordinary drivers. BISC takes pride in recognizing the drivers that make this recognition possible and we are delighted to participate in helping to select and recognize one of America's finest with the ABA Driver of the Year Award."

Pigeon Forge

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12

"So we are getting visitors that had never been here before that are coming to the LeConte Center and also to Cal Ripken Baseball Experience, which is located here in Pigeon Forge" and attracts youth teams from throughout the country, Poole said. "Those two venues have brought in countless incremental business to Pigeon Forge and our area."

The Ripken Experience, built on a ridge above Pigeon Forge in 2016,

includes six replicas of professional ballparks, each with unique dimensions and characteristics.

Crown Coach's Tonahill said Pigeon Forge is attractive for clients of the 11-coach company and within a day's drive.

"I love Pigeon Forge and Gatlinburg and Sevierville, I mean it is a welcoming area, the people are friendly and it's a good destination for tourists," he said.

"You've got all the attractions. You've got Dollywood and the water park there for youth, you've got the shows, and you've got what used to

be Dixie Stampede.

"There's a Motown show there, there's Smoky Mountain Opry, there's Dolly Parton's story about

the Smoky Mountains, Hatfields and McCoys, you've got the Titanic, you've got WonderWorks — I mean I can go down the list," Tona-

hill said.

"It's always neat, they always have good shows; their shows are always first-class," he said.

Freightliner delivers its 50,000th chassis to UPS

GAFFNEY, S.C. — Freightliner Custom Chassis Corp. has delivered its 50,000th chassis to UPS.

"This is a momentous and special day for (Freightliner), one that is the culmination of an incredible amount of teamwork, dedication and effort on the part of a lot of

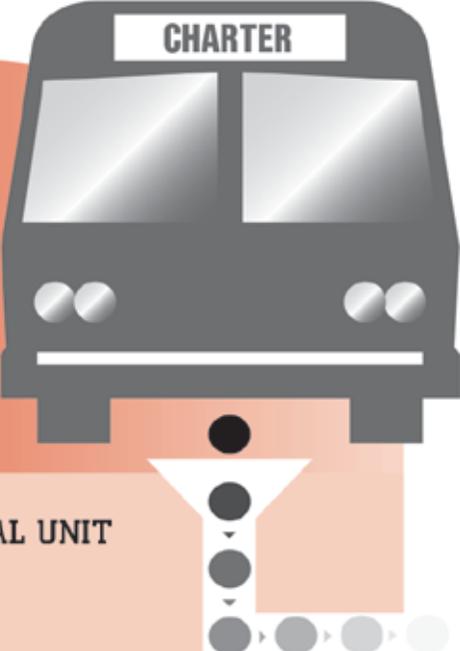
people over the past 20-plus years," said Freightliner Custom Chassis President Jeff Sather.

"This is also a day that certainly wouldn't be possible without UPS, a customer who views us as much more than just a vendor — but rather as a valued, strategic partner, as they have for more than

two decades."

Freightliner began its partnership with UPS in 1996, delivering more than 600 units of its MT-45 chassis that first year. It has delivered more than 1,000 chassis in a year to UPS 13 times since 1996, with a peak of more than 6,000 in 2015.

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Maintenance

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

laughter from the 2,000 industry members in attendance when he said, “We’re not grease monkeys anymore, we’re technicians.”

About 70 percent of the maintenance work on a modern motorcoach is performed without getting greasy fingernails, said Myerhofer, who also won the maintenance competition three years ago. He and a staff of four technicians maintain 100 school buses and 10 motorcoaches.

“We have been able to extend the drain intervals on oil changes so there is less to do there, but there are more electronics. We service our coaches every 13,000 miles. We do an oil analysis and have a huge checklist, with probably 50 points, that starts at the front bumper and goes all the way to the back,” he said.

Myerhofer said that while electronic management is a major part of maintenance these days, “The electronics are not as much trouble as people would think. MCI builds a good bus. There are 13 computers on the bus and you have got to understand how they talk to each other. I try to go to any schooling I can.”

Proud of coaches

Myerhofer feels a sense of pride when he watches one of his motorcoaches hit the road.

“There is a feeling of accomplishment when I pull it outside and see it fixed,” he said. “I’m a big part of the trip. If something goes wrong, the drivers call me 24/7/365 — 95 percent of the time I have an answer for them.”

Lammers started working as a mechanic while still in high school.

“I grasped it, and I got into the motorcoaches more than the school buses,” he said. “My grandfather was a mechanic. I was always taught that if you know how something works, you should be able to back-track and figure out how to fix it.”

Lammers was the Expo maintenance competition winner in 2008, 2014 and 2015. He was the runner-up in 2011 and 2013. He credits his four decades of experience for his success in the competition.

“We have always had a good preventive maintenance program here. I think that is why I do pretty good,” he said.

Continuing education has been an emphasis in his career, which began professionally with Cavalier in 1977.

“We had about 20 school buses and four GMC motorcoaches,” Lammers said. “I tell new guys that when I started the throttle pedal was still connected to the engine by a cable. Those GMCs were old two-stroke Detroit with manual four-speeds. Everything was mechanical, nothing was computerized.



Peter Haunold of Royal Highway Tours in Fairbanks, Alaska, was second runner-up in the 2018 UMA Maintenance Competition. Haunold, also the second runner-up last year, credits devotion to his trade and the Alaska tour cycle for his success.

“Now the whole bus is computerized from the HVAC to the lighting, engines, transmissions and brakes.”

Fleet manager

Lammers is now fleet manager overseeing the maintenance of Cavalier school buses and motorcoaches at nine locations in Minnesota and Iowa. He supervises 31 technicians caring for about 350 pieces of equipment, including 17 motorcoaches, support vehicles and several school buses.

“I haven’t worked in the shop full-time since about 2005 but I keep up. If you are going to oversee people and they come to you for answers, you have to have some ideas,” he said.

Last summer his home shop was a man short for a few weeks so Lammers had to work in the shop.

“I still have it,” he said. “I’m not as good as I was 20 years ago because of my physical abilities. Some of this is big, heavy work. But I still understand how things work.”

He thought he was retired from the maintenance competition until he heard that the prize money was being boosted with the ABC Companies sponsorship.

“When they upped the ante to

\$2,500 to win from \$500, I thought maybe I will come out of retirement. I loved the idea of the competition, the camaraderie and the networking with people.”

Haunold, also the second runner-up last year, credits devotion to his trade and the Alaska tour cycle to his success in the maintenance competition.

“Every time I see one of my coaches on the road, it is like one of my kids,” he said. “It is neat to see the guests going to Denali and other destinations because of what we do to keep them on the road and keep them safe. It is critical that our inspections are spot-on.”

Haunold’s shop keeps its fleet running nearly non-stop from May through September. Then each vehicle gets a thorough check-up and rejuvenation, he said.

“When October hits we bring the coaches in one by one and do a seven-page inspection to make sure every component is ready to make another season.”

Increased complexity

The organizers of the maintenance competition have tried to come up with tougher diagnostic problems to compensate for technicians who continue to become more skillful despite the increas-



Greg Lammers

ing complexity of modern motorcoaches.

“It was a lot tougher than in the past,” Myerhofer said of this year’s competition. “There were some missing lights and things underneath the bus were quite different and tough to find — some air lines and electrical stuff that were disconnected. You had to look hard. There are a lot of smart people there.”

The competition also shines a light on the motorcoach industry, Myerhofer said.

“It shows the pride and quality of the technicians who work on the buses. When our buses leave the yard, customers can realize there are good people working on them and they are safe to drive. Anything mechanical can break. If we know how to fix it before it is on the road, then all the better.”

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Calendar

June 2018

18-21 Pennsylvania Bus Association Annual Meeting, Doubletree Hilton, Williamsburg, Pa. Info: www.pabus.org

21-24 New England Bus Association Annual Conference, Water’s Edge Resort & Spa, Westbrook, Conn. Info: www.newenglandbus.org

July 2018

22-26 AMA-SCMA-GMOA Regional Meeting, Evergreen Marriott Conference Resort, Stone Mountain, Ga. Info: www.gamotorcoachoperators.org

August 2018

7-10 International Motorcoach Group Strategic Alliance Meeting, Doubletree Hilton, Sonoma, Calif. Info: www.imgcoach.com

16-19 2018 NAMO Annual Conference, Westin Cape Coral Resort at Marina Village, Cape Coral, Fla. Info: www.namocoaches.org

September 2018

12 Maryland Motorcoach Association Annual Crab Fest, Info: www.marylandmotorcoach.org

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