

Bus & Motorcoach NEWS

WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE BUS INDUSTRY

Crash-accountability program to review safety scores

WASHINGTON — The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration has launched a two-year crash-accountability demonstration program that will classify a crash as “not preventable” on a carrier’s Safety Measurement System profile in instances where the carrier was not at fault.

The program comes as good news to members of the United Motorcoach Association, who have long complained that the current

SMS system doesn’t differentiate between crashes caused by the carrier and those where the carrier wasn’t at fault.

That results in the carrier receiving a negative safety profile even if it wasn’t at fault and the crash wasn’t preventable.

Under the demonstration program, if a crash is found to be not preventable, a carrier’s private Crash Indicator Behavioral Analysis Safety Improvement Category,

or BASIC, score will be recalculated with the crash omitted.

“Stakeholders have expressed concern that the Crash Indicator BASIC may not identify the highest-risk motor carriers for interventions and that the listing of crashes on the public website, without an indication of preventability, can give an inaccurate impression about the risk posed by the company,” FMCSA said in a *Federal Register* notice announc-

ing the program.

“The data gathered through the demonstration program will allow the agency to better evaluate the utility of making crash preventability determinations.”

Under the program, expected to last two years, carriers have to submit a “request for data review,” or RDR, through the FMCSA’s DataQs system, attaching documentation that establishes the carrier could not have avoided the

crash. The RDRs must be submitted for crashes that occurred on or after June 1 of this year.

Crashes covered under the program include those “resulting in fatalities, bodily injuries requiring immediate medical treatment away from the scene of the crash, or a vehicle being towed from the scene because of disabling damage,” the agency’s notice said.

FMCSA said a crash would be

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Leaf peeping is big business for New England operators

NEW ENGLAND — New England and fall conjure thoughts of football and foliage — and while Tom Brady has engineered his share of winning drives for the New England Patriots, motorcoach and tour companies lead teams of leaf peepers each September and October on spectacular drives of their own.

For many operators in New England, fall foliage tours are Super Bowls of business and, like the annual Big Game, offer their own spectacle, with changing leaves serving as nature’s pom-poms in brilliant shades of red, gold, orange and yellow carpeting hillsides, lining roads and filling camera frames.

“It’s the biggest part of the season for us,” said Jeanne M.

McGurn, owner and president of The Maine Tour Connection in South Portland, a tour wholesaler that arranges custom tours throughout New England.

Her favorite fall-foliage location? Anywhere in Maine, said McGurn, also known as the “Lobster Lady.”

“I love taking the ride up to Boothbay — there’s a section that’s almost like being in a color tunnel,” she said of Route 1, which follows the Maine coastline. “It’s just so beautiful.”

Maine comes up often in fall color conversation, particularly Acadia National Park and Bar Harbor. But New England neighbors New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and

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Northeast Charter & Tour Co., which operates 28 charter buses out of Lewiston, Maine, gets a lot of business in the fall from cruise ship passengers seeking tours of New England to see the colorful changing leaves.

Midwest cities have ramped up party bus enforcement

CHICAGO — Several tragedies have propelled the Midwest to the front lines of the regulatory battle against unregulated party buses.

Chicago authorities ordered 17 bus operators out of service last month after a three-day “enforcement action” in the city’s central business district.

Aldermen passed a stricter ordinance in April after 11 shoot-

ings, three of them fatal, had been connected to party buses in two years.

Missouri legislators are being asked to provide more tools to reduce party bus hazards after recent events in St. Louis and Kansas City.

In July 2015, St. Louis police, accompanied by a *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* reporter, inspected 32 buses in four nights of special patrols in pop-

ular nighttime neighborhoods.

They ordered 18 of the drivers out of service and parked three buses for mechanical and licensing violations.

“Tougher laws and increased enforcement are crucial to get unsafe and illegal party buses off Missouri and Kansas City roads,” state legislators and police told the *Kansas City Star*.

Reporters from the *Star* recently

spent 10 weekends trailing buses around the city’s popular nightspots.

The newspaper’s investigation was prompted partly by the 2013 death of 26-year-old Jamie Frecks, who fell from a party bus traveling in Kansas City, Kan., during a bachelorette party.

“She was standing with her back to the side double doors when the bus hit a bump while rounding a curve. The doors popped open

and Frecks plunged onto the interstate and under oncoming traffic,” according to one of the stories about the incident.

“In the Kansas City area alone, more than half — perhaps as many as two-thirds — of party bus companies fail to follow state and federal rules designed to keep the public safe,” the newspaper wrote.

The *Star* series described the

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ABC
COMPANIES

ABC and Van Hool celebrating 30 years of partnership

FARIBAULT, Minn. — ABC Companies and Van Hool are celebrating their 30th anniversary as business partners.

The family-owned companies joined forces in 1987 to offer Van Hool's premium European motorcoaches in the American market, supported by ABC's established distribution, sales, parts and service network.

Since then Van Hool has modified equipment models and subsequently introduced a series of fully Americanized versions that have steadily gained popularity, grown market share and increased customer loyalty.

"There are a number of key turning points in our history together," said Roman Cornell, ABC's chief commercial officer. "And it's exciting to see where the breakthroughs occurred."

A notable milestone was the breakaway success of the Van Hool C2000 series, built exclusively for the North American market and introduced in 2000.

Within a year, it not only became the most popular imported coach in the United States, it also outsold all the other imported coach models combined, Cornell said.

"Customers loved this product because it was the direct result of listening to their input," he said. "While they know to expect premium quality and support from Van Hool and ABC, I believe what they really appreciate is the hands-on aspect of working with both of our companies."



ABC Companies and Van Hool are celebrating the 30th anniversary of their partnership. Pictured from left to right are Van Hool officials Frank Smulders, Benedicte Gruwez, Filip Van Hool and Jan Van Hool, and ABC officials Dane Cornell, Roman Cornell, Ryhan Cornell and Ashley Cornell.

There currently are more than 10,000 Van Hool motorcoaches on the road.

"Customers know that we are just as invested in surviving and succeeding as they are," said Van Hool CEO Filip Van Hool.

He said the family-oriented cultures at both ABC and Van Hool make it easy for

customers to do business with their firms, offering significant benefits that are not applicable when transacting with a larger corporate structure.

"Our priority is to give customers the confidence and the solutions they need to support their operations," said ABC Chair-

man and CEO Dane Cornell, adding that the company's entrepreneurial business approach supports that objective.

Cornell noted that few manufacturers could claim that they've had three generations actively run a successful business, a trait shared with many operators throughout North America.

Accessibility within both organizations often results in product modifications directly forged by customer needs and preferences. Prime examples of customer collaboration include the introduction of the Van Hool TD925 double-deck coach and the CX35 model.

The double-deck coach delivered a high-capacity solution to Coach USA for the launch of its Megabus market expansion and is the go-to solution for a number of Silicon Valley employee shuttle programs. There are more than 600 Van Hool double-deck coaches operating in the U.S., the company said.

Similarly, the 35-foot CX35 Van Hool model was introduced to answer operator calls for a smaller version of the popular 45-foot CX45 coach with a reduced passenger capacity that would not sacrifice the "big coach" look, style and feel.

The new CX35 model has been another success, with orders exceeding expectations. Thanks to standardized design and

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THE DOCKET

FMCSA withdraws proposed sleep apnea rule for drivers

WASHINGTON — The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration continues to back away from pending motor carrier regulations, announcing recently that it will no longer pursue a proposed rule on obstructive sleep apnea for commercial drivers.

The agency's announcement that it was withdrawing the sleep apnea rule followed its decisions to eliminate or delay proposed rules that would have increased insurance liability minimums on commercial motor vehicles and mandated that such vehicles use speed limiters.

FMCSA's actions follow an order issued by the Trump administration earlier this year that federal agencies freeze new regulations and delay those published but not yet effective.

FMCSA said in announcing the sleep apnea move that it has "determined there is not enough information available to support moving forward with a rulemaking action and so the rulemaking will be withdrawn."

The rule originally was proposed on March 10, 2016, by FMCSA and the Federal Railroad Administration to determine the prevalence of moderate-to-severe

obstructive sleep apnea (OSA) among individuals occupying safety sensitive positions in highway and rail transportation and its potential consequences for the safety of highway and rail transportation.

A sleep apnea rule would have given clarity to medical examiners, operators and drivers about what conditions or combination of conditions would prompt a driver to be referred for an apnea test and treatment.

Currently, medical examiners have the discretion to determine which drivers are referred for testing, and that apparently will continue.

In a *Federal Register* notice, FMCSA and FRA said current safety programs addressing fatigue management "are the appropriate avenues to address OSA."

Experts say that drivers who have been diagnosed with sleep apnea cannot discontinue treatment and that a certified medical examiner can still request that a driver be tested in order to medically qualify to operate a commercial vehicle.

They said FMCSA likely will rely on past guidance on the issue, including a 2015 bulletin the agency issued stating that it "does not

require that these drivers be considered unfit to continue their driving careers, only that the medical examiner make a determination whether they need to be evaluated and, if warranted, demonstrate they are managing their obstructive sleep apnea to reduce the risk of drowsy driving."

The United Motorcoach Association said it agrees with the decision, noting that current regulations concerning sleep apnea are adequate.

"We are pleased Transportation Secretary (Elaine) Chao reviewed the proposed rule and chose to withdraw," said Ken Presley, UMA's vice president of industry relations and COO.

Presley said HR 2120, Buses United for Safety, Regulatory Reform and Enhanced Growth for the 21st Century (BUSREGS-21), which was introduced in the spring by Rep. Scott Perry, R-Pa., calls for FMCSA to withdraw the proposed rule.

The Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association filed a lawsuit against FMCSA in January claiming a rule on medical examiner's certification integration added sleep apnea regulatory language that bypassed the rulemak-

ing process.

OOIDA also submitted formal comments opposing a sleep apnea rule, citing reports showing there is insufficient data to confirm a relationship between moderate-to-severe obstructive sleep apnea and increased crash risk.

"OOIDA opposes any regulations requiring obstructive sleep

apnea screening until FMCSA identifies obstructive sleep apnea as the cause of a not-insignificant number of truck crashes," the association wrote in its comments. "FMCSA should not jump to the immediate conclusion that obstructive sleep apnea is the primary cause of fatigue and that fatigue is the primary cause of crashes."

CVSA Operation Safe Driver Week planned for Oct. 15-21

GREENBELT, Md. — Law enforcement agencies throughout North America will engage in heightened traffic-safety enforcement and educational outreach during the week of Oct. 15-21.

During the Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance's annual Operation Safe Driver Week, enforcement personnel will identify commercial motor vehicle and passenger-vehicle drivers who are exhibiting unsafe driving behaviors and issue warnings and/or citations.

Unsafe driver behaviors continue to be the leading 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.

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 targeting such unsafe driver behaviors as speeding, distracted driving, texting, failure to use a seatbelt, traveling too closely, improper lane changes and failure to obey traffic control devices.

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

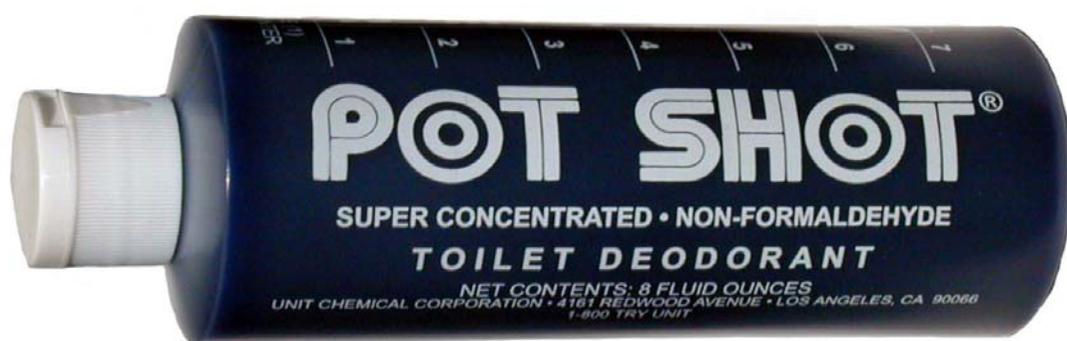
To find out about Operation Safe Driver Week enforcement events, visit <http://cvsa.org/contactpage/contacts/law-enforcement-lead-agency-contacts> to access a list of law enforcement lead agencies around North America.

Safety belts save lives

WASHINGTON — Safety belts saved 13,941 lives in 2015, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates.

If everyone buckled up, an additional 2,800 deaths could have been prevented, NHTSA said.

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FMCSA accepting comments on diabetes form for drivers

WASHINGTON — The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration is requesting public comments on a proposed form relating to insulin-dependent diabetes.

The agency is anticipating a final rule bringing to an end the ban against the operation of commercial motor vehicles in inter-

state commerce by insulin-dependent diabetic drivers.

The agency is required to submit an Information Collection Request to the White House Office of Management and Budget for its review and approval when considering a change to information collection.

The agency previously pub-

lished a proposed rule in 2015 on insulin-dependent diabetes and received public comments and recommendations from its Medical Review Board.

Based on the board's analysis and recommendations, FMCSA is considering replacing the previously proposed written notifica-

tion from the treating clinician with a form titled "Insulin-Treated Diabetes Mellitus Assessment Form," to be completed by the clinician and provided to a certified medical examiner.

The form could be required for CMV drivers treated with insulin for diabetes who wish to drive in

interstate commerce.

FMCSA is accepting public comments on the proposed revision and the form. Comments can be submitted on or before September 25, 2017, at <https://www.regulations.gov>, referencing Federal Docket Management System Docket Number FMCSA-2005-23151.

States now can administer CDL tests to non-residents

WASHINGTON — State driver licensing agencies will be allowed to administer commercial driver's license tests to individuals from another state, according to regulatory guidance issued by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration.

The guidance also allows the agencies to accept commercial learner's permit applications for residents of another state.

"Today's guidance makes clear that state driver licensing agencies may accept applications for commercial learner's permits and ad-

minister the general knowledge test to individuals taking commercial motor vehicle driver training in that state, but who are not domiciled there," FMCSA said.

The guidance is an extension of an October 2016 rule allowing states to accept CDL applications

from active-duty military personnel stationed there.

Trucking groups responded to that rule by requesting that it be extended to include all drivers, not just military personnel.

"While today's guidance is in answer to general knowledge testing

as addressed in FMCSA regulations, we note that this regulatory guidance is consistent with the agency's Oct. 13, 2016, final rule, which amended the CDL regulations to ease the transition of military personnel into civilian careers (as commercial drivers)," FMCSA said.

Crash accountability

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

considered not preventable if the documentation submitted by the motor carrier or driver established that the vehicle was struck by a motorist who was convicted of one of the four following offenses or a related offense: driving under the influence, driving in the wrong direction, striking the CMV in the rear, or striking the CMV while it was legally stopped.

RDRs also can be submitted when an individual committed suicide by stepping or driving in front of the CMV, when a CMV was incapacitated by an animal in the roadway, or when the crash was the result of an infrastructure failure, such as falling trees, rocks or other debris or a CMV being struck by cargo or equipment from another vehicle.

FMCSA will use contract resources to complete two stages of review within the DataQs system.

"In stage 1, the reviewer will collect all documents related to the crash from the submitter and FMCSA systems," the agency's notice said.

"In stage 2, an experienced crash report reviewer will evaluate all of the documents from the submitter and FMCSA systems."

The stage 2 reviewer will confirm that the crash meets one of the crash types and, based on the evidence reviewed, will make a recommendation to FMCSA as to

whether compelling evidence demonstrates that the crash was not preventable.

The FMCSA reviewer will review the evidence considered by the stage 1 reviewer and the stage 2 recommendation. If FMCSA agrees with the recommendation of not preventable, the crash will be posted for public input.

If the recommendation is for a determination that the crash was preventable or that the information submitted was insufficient to sup-

port a determination, and the FMCSA reviewer agrees, the determination of "preventable" or "undecided" would be noted in the public SMS display. Changes would be reflected on SMS within 60 days.

"The agency will consider all relevant evidence submitted," FMCSA said in its *Federal Register* notice. "The burden is on the submitter to show by compelling evidence that the crash was not preventable."

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Maintaining smaller fleet results in bigger profits

By Lexi Tucker

RALEIGH, N.C. — Everyone's familiar with the phrase "quality over quantity." Even though it's a cliché, there's a reason it's often said — it's true.

Chris Cardo, owner of Raleigh Dream Limos, has seen firsthand the benefits of keeping your fleet a manageable size.

At one point, Cardo owned six stretch limos, but sold most of them and invested in a newer fleet consisting mostly of limo buses. He now owns three LGE buses and one Hummer stretch.

"As we all know, buses are the way of the future, so that's why we decided to go that route. The limo

buses provide a much better experience for our clients," he says.

Staying small has helped the company maintain a focus on keeping the interior of the vehicles in a "like new" condition. Cardo replaces seats frequently and orders new interior parts directly from LGE.

Downsizing slightly has only had a positive effect on ride quality and his clients' experience, Cardo says. "As a result, we actually became more profitable."

Although he didn't aspire to own a chauffeured transportation company, a friend who owned one introduced him to the industry.

"I was in college at the time and began researching the indus-

try," Cardo says. "Immediately upon graduation, I purchased a white stretch Hummer and Raleigh Dream Limos was open for business.

"I'm very glad I chose to enter this industry. It's always a pleasure to provide a great experience for people and have them be extremely happy with the service they received. It's obviously great to make money, too."

As a younger operator, he believes his technology awareness and how it's changing the transportation industry allows him to better plan for the future and insulate his business model from potential risks from technology advancements.

Online reviews can make or break you now, and Cardo relies on his solid digital reputation.

"We receive a lot of repeat business, which is great, because it means our clients enjoyed our services so much the first time they would like to experience it again," he says. "It's imperative you always take care of your customers, no matter the cost."

Excited about the industry's potential, Cardo plans to incorporate as much technology into his business model as possible.

"As an industry, we need to keep pushing forward. I know many operators, including myself, are nervous about the future. However, I feel there will be many op-

portunities for growth. I believe a lot of our future lies in the hands of the vehicle manufacturers," he says.

"I think the interior of the vehicles need to evolve to provide even more of a unique experience. I'm talking more from the view of a retail operator, but even with shuttle-style vehicles, I think there needs to be an evolution of the interior, with more integrated technology and futuristic design.

"We need to be the ones who innovate in a way that keeps our industry and services relevant and useful to the world."

This article originally appeared in Limousine, Charter & Tour magazine.

Prescription drugs, fatigue cited in deadly crashes

SAN ANTONIO — A grand jury has indicted a Texas pickup truck driver accused of causing an accident in March that killed 13 people in a minibus returning from a church retreat.

Meanwhile, the Merced County (Calif.) district attorney's office filed four felony counts of vehicular manslaughter and five misdemeanor vehicle code violations against a tour bus driver involved in a 2016 accident that killed four passengers.

In the Texas case, the Uvalde County district attorney's office said Jack Dillon Young, 20, was indicted on multiple charges, including intoxication manslaughter and aggravated assault with a deadly weapon causing serious bodily injury.

A National Transportation Safety Board report said Young told investigators he was checking his phone for a text when the crash occurred near San Antonio. He said he had taken prescription

drugs before the crash and investigators found marijuana in his pickup, the report said.

The driver of the bus and 12 passengers from First Baptist Church of New Braunfels were

killed when Young's pickup struck the bus. One passenger survived and was hospitalized with serious injuries. All were senior adult members of the church.

An affidavit from a Texas De-

partment of Public Safety trooper seeking a blood test for a toxicology report said there was probable cause to believe Young was intoxicated during the collision because Young acknowledged ingesting

prescription drugs including clonazepam and the generic forms of Lexapro and Ambien.

In California, Mario David Vasquez of Los Angeles, who was driving a tour bus on Aug. 2, 2016, outside Livingston when he left the roadway and crashed into a pole, splitting the bus down the middle.

The crash killed four passengers and seriously injured eight others.

Officials said the logbook kept by Vasquez showed he slept 6½ hours before driving, but that cell-phone records contradict that record. They said they believe driver fatigue led to the deadly crash.

Besides being charged with vehicular manslaughter, Vasquez was charged with misdemeanor violations stemming from the falsification of his daily log book, failure to keep accurate records and violating laws relating to maximum driving time for commercial drivers.

Positive drug-test rate rose in 2016

WASHINGTON — A U.S. Department of Transportation report shows that the overall 2016 lab-reported positive drug-test rate for truck drivers and other DOT security-sensitive employees rose to its highest level since at least 2009.

However, despite the rate increase, the actual number of people who tested positive for several drugs declined year-over-year, due to about 800,000 fewer tests being administered in 2016.

The overall 2016 drug testing failure rate for all tests reported by certified labs increased to 1.98 percent from 1.85 percent in 2015, the report said.

The rate includes driver random, pre-employment, post-accident, "reasonable suspicion" and return-to-duty drug tests.

More commercial motor vehicle drivers tested positive for marijuana in 2016 than any other drug category.

The rate of positive tests for amphetamines continued to climb at a rapid rate, followed by increases in cocaine test failures. The positive rate for cocaine rose from 0.24 percent to 0.27 percent after declining the past three years.

Truck and bus drivers took about 97 percent of the 5.5 million lab-reported random DOT tests,

down from 6.3 million tested in 2015, according to the report. The decline in overall numbers of tests was largely due to a reduction in the agency's required random testing rate to 25 percent of commercial driver license holders in 2016, compared with 50 percent in 2015.

Despite a nationwide opioid overdose epidemic, USDOT has not yet approved testing for the highly abused pain medicine. However, in a January notice of proposed rulemaking, the agency took a step toward requiring opioid testing for the prescription medications hydrocodone, hydro-morphine, oxycodone and oxymorphone.

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Read background checks to avoid hiring a serial killer

By Dave Millhouser

"We found your friend passed out in the hall and dragged him into his room."

I was checking out of a hotel early one Friday, and the desk clerk somehow thought he was offering good news.

I'd been asked to train "Bob" and we'd been traveling together all week, visiting customers. Once you recover from imagining me training anybody, it gets better.

All week there had been subtle signs of trouble. Bob was four hours late for an appointment — twice.

One clue to the cause of his behavior was when he turned up an hour late for breakfast — the morning after the hotel gave us free drink coupons.

Other evidentiary flares popped up. He had been reluctant to give us a Social Security number and was a bit undecided about where he actually lived.

A Google search showed that he was the current CEO of his previous employer. In other words, either he was going to work two

jobs or Bob wasn't his real name.

It's important to know who you're hiring. The regulations regarding what you can and can't do in terms of interview questions and background checks are complex, but you want to know as much as you can before committing to a candidate.

Someone in your company should be familiar with the process and adept at gathering as much information as is legal.

A friend pointed out that it's not enough to gather information, it's important to read it. The applicant who lists "serial killer" as his previous job either has a sick sense of humor or is hoping you won't study the application too thoroughly.

You might want to be looking for the gaps in employment that often accompany incarceration.

You'd be surprised at the number of times (misguided) friends have asked me to be a reference, and then were hired without anyone calling me.

Previous employers often are nervous about giving less-than-stellar recommendations (even

where merited), but you can often read between the lines. "Waste no time interviewing him" can be interpreted two ways, but if you hear the sound of rolling eyeballs, it's safest to adopt the negative one.

Some operators outsource a substantial portion of background checks and drug testing. But remember, if you mess up, you are on the hook. If they mess up, you are on the hook.

Make sure you pick good companies, and again, read what they send you. In the current environment, hiring a person is almost like adopting them.

Don't assume you can change applicants just because you're really desperate for their skills as drivers or mechanics. If they wrecked previous employers' buses, they'll ding yours.

There's a manager/sales guy type awaiting sentencing who worked, one after another, for virtually every bus company in a major city. He stole from them all.

Each hired him, tempted by his proven ability to sell charters, and assumed they could win over his cheating heart. One even offered

him a raise if he'd stop stealing (he decided to take BOTH options).

People sometimes do grow or change, but it's critical to know their history. If you hire someone with a troubled past, don't stick him in situations that create temptation. A reformed embezzler might make a great driver, but you should be wary of hiring him as your CFO.

Our building in Buena Vista, Colo., was down the street from a correctional facility, and it allowed "civilians" to take part in some of its vocational programs. One of our guys decided to take a welding class, and returned breathlessly to the garage.

He had noticed "Jim," one of our ex-drivers, in the class — wearing prison garb. We'd wondered what had happened to Jim. He'd returned from a trip and disappeared. If we'd done a background check we wouldn't have been surprised.

Now we knew where he'd be — for about five years.

Sometimes a little digging turns up good things. At a party I was chatting about airplanes with

a young man who looked about 16. He mentioned he was a pilot and asked if I knew where he could rent a plane to tootle around in.

While I'm not an aviator, finding an airport is within my meager skill set. It seemed wise to ask about his experience, and since he looked like a teenybopper, I checked with the party's hostess.

It turned out that he looked 16 but was 26, and a combat proven F-16 pilot in the Israeli Air Force. He was taking graduate classes in the U.S. and thought a bit of aerial sightseeing might be fun.

Now THAT is the kind of surprise you'd like to find in the background of a recent hire. He would make an excellent bus driver, and be available to strafe pesky competitors.

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



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MCI opening sales and service center in S.F. Bay Area

DES PLAINES, Ill. — Motor Coach Industries plans to open a sales and service facility this fall in the San Francisco Bay Area, its second in California and seventh in the U.S. and Canada.

The new facility will open in October in Hayward, Calif.

The two-story, 34,000-square-foot building covering 4.2 acres features the latest motorcoach diagnostic equipment and tooling with the capacity to provide comprehensive service from general maintenance work to complete coach refurbishing.

The service center will have 10 service bays including a paint booth. The rest of the facility will feature OEM parts pickup, offices for administrative staff and technician training facilities to keep local operators' maintenance team members at the top of their game on new coach systems.

"We are investing in the very latest diagnostic equipment and technologies with a layout in the shop to get coaches in and out fast, with accurate, reliable repairs to help operators maximize coach uptime," said Jim Macdonald, vice president of MCI's Quality and Customer Service Group.

"The goal is to have the facility be an attractive destination for MCI and Setra coach operators and serve them with OEM parts. Yet we will have the capacity to work on other motorcoach and bus brands as well."

The City of Hayward sits on the eastern



Motor Coach Industries plans to open a sales and service facility in Hayward, Calif., its second in California and seventh in the U.S. and Canada. The two-story, 34,000-square-foot building will open in October.

side of the San Francisco Bay Area. The new MCI location is near the eastern end of the San Mateo-Hayward Bridge, easily accessible from the local interstates. City officials have welcomed MCI, providing assistance to assure an on-time opening and ongoing success.

"The attraction of an MCI Sales and Service Center to our industrial crescent is a win for this community," said Paul Nguyen, economic development specialist for the city. "MCI will create over 35 new job opportunities for our residents, including specialized mechanic and technician positions. They

could potentially grow to become a major contributor to the city's sales tax base."

The new facility will provide service to both large and small operators in the area that together operate more than 450 MCI and Setra coaches in the Bay Area, said Jon Williams, program manager of the MCI Service Centers. He is responsible for the opening of the new Hayward center and future upgrades at the other six MCI service centers in North America.

Williams said MCI would hire locally for 18 technicians at the center.

He said that in terms of capacity, attractiveness and operations, Hayward will raise the bar in service and present the model of all other MCI Service Center facilities in the next few years.

"It will be our new flagship facility for MCI sales and service, representing brand consistency across all of our seven locations and any we may add in the future," Williams said. "Any operator of MCI and Setra coaches traveling cross-country will feel as much at home in the MCI Sales and Service Center in Des Plaines, Ill., or in Dallas and they'll enjoy the highest standard of service that only MCI can provide."

MCI recently realigned its field service, technical call center and warranty operations and transformed its service center structure from aftermarket parts to an OEM

CONTINUED ON PAGE 11 ►

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Where the best companies turn for M&A advice

<p><small>This announcement appears as a matter of record only</small></p> <p>CHARTER BUS LINES <i>of Bristol Columbia</i></p> <p>has merged with</p> <p>TRAXX COACHES</p> <p><small>The undersigned initiated and acted as advisor in the transaction</small></p> <p>cfa CORPORATE FINANCE ASSOCIATES <small>Since 1956</small></p>	<p><small>This announcement appears as a matter of record only</small></p> <p>PARKVIEW</p> <p>CVG GROUP LLC</p> <p>has acquired an interest in</p> <p>Transportation Demand Management, Inc. dba</p> <p>STARLINE LUXURY COACHES</p> <p><small>The undersigned initiated and acted as advisor in the transaction</small></p> <p>cfa CORPORATE FINANCE ASSOCIATES <small>Securities transacted through Silver Oak Securities, Inc.</small></p>	<p><small>This announcement appears as a matter of record only</small></p> <p>THE SOUTHWEST AMERICAN COACH COMPANY</p> <p>Industrial Bus Lines dba</p> <p>All Aboard America</p> <p>has been acquired by</p> <p>CELERITY PARTNERS</p> <p>All Aboard America Holdings, Inc. Founded by</p> <p>Celerity Partners</p> <p><small>The undersigned initiated and acted as advisor in the transaction</small></p> <p>cfa CORPORATE FINANCE ASSOCIATES <small>Securities transacted through Corporate Finance Securities, Inc.</small></p>
<p><small>This announcement appears as a matter of record only</small></p> <p>Calco Travel, Inc.</p> <p>has been acquired by</p> <p>CELERITY PARTNERS</p> <p>All Aboard America Holdings, Inc. Founded by</p> <p>Celerity Partners</p> <p><small>The undersigned initiated and acted as advisor in the transaction</small></p> <p>cfa CORPORATE FINANCE ASSOCIATES <small>Securities transacted through Corporate Finance Securities, Inc.</small></p>	<p><small>This announcement appears as a matter of record only</small></p> <p>Gray Line</p> <p>LLC, Inc. dba Gray Line of Nashville</p> <p>has been acquired by</p> <p>Red Clay Capital Holdings Red Clay Capital Holdings, LLC</p> <p><small>The undersigned initiated and acted as advisor in the transaction</small></p> <p>cfa CORPORATE FINANCE ASSOCIATES <small>Since 1956</small></p>	<p><small>This announcement appears as a matter of record only</small></p> <p>HOTARD</p> <p>Hotard Travel, Inc.</p> <p>has been acquired by</p> <p>CELERITY PARTNERS</p> <p>All Aboard America Holdings, Inc. Founded by</p> <p>Celerity Partners</p> <p><small>The undersigned initiated and acted as advisor in the transaction</small></p> <p>cfa CORPORATE FINANCE ASSOCIATES <small>Securities transacted through Corporate Finance Securities, Inc.</small></p>

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MCI Academy is first coach program accredited by ASE

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — The National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence (ASE) has accredited MCI Academy for its comprehensive training program for motorcoach equipment professionals.

MCI Academy, operated by bus and motorcoach manufacturer Motor Coach Industries, is the first motor coach training provider to receive ASE accreditation for meeting the rigorous Continuing Automotive Service Education (CASE) standards.

Others that have achieved ASE accreditation include 3M Automotive Aftermarket Division, BMW of North America, General Motors Service Technical College, Toyota and Penske Truck Leasing.

“With this achievement, we join some pretty big names and it’s a testament to the quality of the training we provide,” said Brian Dewsnup, president of MCI Aftermarket Parts.

“Congratulations to (training manager) Scott Crawford and our excellent team of technical experts for their commitment in raising the bar in motorcoach technician training,” Dewsnup said. “The ASE accreditation makes official that MCI Academy is the training destination for any organization in the private and public sectors struggling to bring new hires up to speed quickly or advance the skills of experienced technicians.”

In awarding the accreditation to MCI Academy, David Milne, president of the Automotive Training Managers Council and executive director of ASE, said, “The automotive community is proud of your commitment to a quality in-service technician-training program.”

MCI Academy has built a multifaceted hands-on and online training program to further professionals’ skills on multiple coach systems.

Live events at its training headquarters in Louisville include the popular Technical Tune-Up series. Professionals also can access the academy’s online learning management system at any time.

At MCI Academy, technicians can earn:

- System Qualifications — Students develop a high level of competence on the major systems and must complete a combination of online courses, instructor-led training and testing.

- Levels 1, 2 and 3 Certification — To earn certificates, students need to complete designated System Qualifications.

- Specialty diplomas — Students can earn diplomas in HVAC and electrical systems for various coach models.

MCI Academy didn’t just meet ASE standards — its accreditation report indicated it exceeded them, particularly in the way it designs its coursework.

“Anyone who earns their technician-level certificate or a system diploma through the MCI Academy should feel a sense of pride and an acknowledgement of a true higher-learning and career accomplishment,” Crawford said. “It’s a ticket to a bright future.”

MCI Academy’s five-year ASE accreditation comes at time when skilled technicians are scarce and in-house training systems too are costly to implement for many businesses.

MCI Academy is definitely filling a need, said Willy Wondolowski, maintenance director at Gold Coast Tours in Brea, Calif., who has taken more than 422 classes online.

“I use the coursework to improve my knowledge on systems,” Wondolowski said. “I encourage my technicians to do the same. I’ll open up an (online) course and watch it together in the shop to fa-

miliarize my team on new systems.

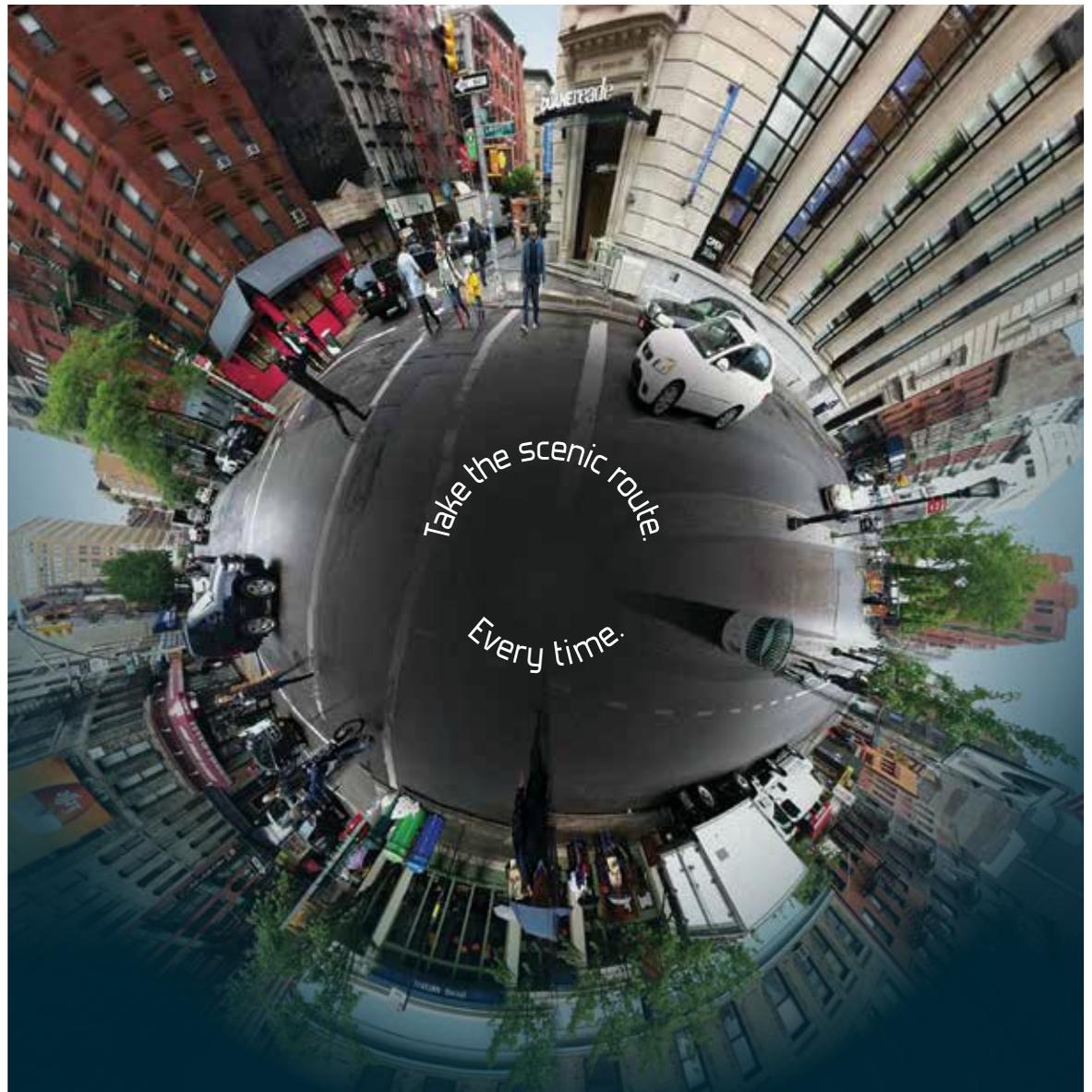
“With the thousands of buses on the road, we need highly trained technicians, and in turn a well-trained technician is rewarded with

job security,” he said.

MCI launched its online learning management system in 2015, and has more than 6,100 registered users accessing a growing library

of more than 430 courses. MCI has trained more than 1,200 technicians at its Technical Tune Up sessions.

For more information on MCI Academy, visit www.mciacademy.com.



Service center

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10

factory function to enhance the service and support experience for customers.

The greater San Francisco area is notable in the motorcoach industry for its extensive employer-funded shuttle networks serving the high-tech industry in Silicon Valley and San Francisco. These systems offer daily service with upscale amenities, making access to top service and parts assistance critical.

“Our Sales and Service Centers provide our most important point of personal contact with our customers, and (MCI parent) New Flyer is planning significant long-term in-

vestments in this area,” said Ian Smart, president of MCI. “We’re particularly pleased to be kicking off these improvements in northern California because its coach population is significant and will provide a blueprint for the way we upgrade throughout North America.”

The company will hold a grand opening celebration at the new facility on Nov. 14 as part of an MCI Reliability Rally annual open house, with events including test drives of MCI and Setra coaches, service discounts, supplier sessions and special deals on new and pre-owned coaches. Visitors will also enjoy lunch and a chance to win prizes. For a complete schedule of events visit www.mcicoach.com.

Mobile observation has finally come full circle with the SEE360 camera system from Voyager. This four-camera system gives you a seamless, 360° panoramic view around the entire vehicle. Because each individual camera offers an



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UMA accepting Vision Award nominations until Oct. 16

ALEXANDRIA, Va. — The United Motorcoach Association is seeking nominations for the most prestigious honors private motorcoach operators can receive, the UMA Vision Awards, which are presented annually to a large and small coach company.

In the past, UMA has relied on its associate members to nominate operators for the awards and that will continue this year.

But, like it has over the past three years, UMA also is calling on motorcoach operator members to nominate peer companies they think are deserving of the honor.

The deadline for nominations is Oct. 16.

The awards will be presented as part of the UMA Leadership Awards Celebration during Motorcoach Expo 2018 in San Antonio Jan. 6-10.

The Vision Awards recognize motorcoach operators that:

- Engage in sound business practices
- Have excellent safety records
- Regularly employ innovative marketing, operations and customer service approaches
- Are good corporate citizens within the community

- Raise the standards for all motorcoach companies

- Raise the profile of the entire motorcoach industry
- Are financially sound

A nominee being “financially sound” is a component that was added a few years ago to the nomination criteria. After a company’s nomination form has been submitted and reviewed, UMA will contact the top-nominated companies to obtain financial information.

This information will be evaluated on a confidential basis by an independent certified public accountant who will assure the nom-

inated company is financially sound. This criteria ensures that every Vision Award recipient operates in a manner in which all motorcoach operators should strive to operate.

There are two Vision Awards, one that goes to a large operator (15 coaches or more) and the other for a small operator (fewer than 15 coaches).

To be eligible, a nominated company must:

- Have current operating authority as required by federal, state and local laws
- Have a USDOT “satisfacto-

ry” safety rating and/or comparable rating(s) as provided by applicable state agencies

- Be a member in good standing of UMA

UMA members — both operator and associate — can nominate coach operators for the Vision Awards using the form at <https://motorcoachexpo.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2017/07/Vision-Award-Nomination-Form-2018.pdf>.

Please email the completed form to Carrington Blake at cblake@uma.org or send it via fax to 703-838-2950 by Oct. 16.

Silverado adds night service between Vegas and Reno

RENO, Nev. — Silverado Stages has announced the addition of regular overnight-ticketed transportation service between Las Vegas and Reno on its Silverado Mainline route.

The Nevada Department of Transportation, with support from a Federal Transit Administration 5311(f) rural intercity bus grant program, and Silverado Stages re-instituted a long-dormant public transportation link for the small

communities between Reno and Las Vegas in 2014.

Since then, the service has operated daily in both directions only during daylight hours.

Continued ridership growth has demonstrated need for nighttime service, which allows residents to travel to the doctor, for work, or for shopping during the day and return home at night without needing a hotel room.

Travel is on luxury motor-

coaches with all the amenities for comfort and connectivity.

The Silverado Mainline service includes stops in Sparks, Carson City, Fallon, Hawthorne, Tonopah, Beatty and Pahrump.

It is the only public transportation connecting this route and the small communities in between, providing rural residents in the towns, unincorporated areas, military installations, Native American and rural communities with trans-

portation day or night.

The Silverado Mainline also connects to the Greyhound stations in Reno and Las Vegas, allowing a seamless ride to destinations throughout the United States and Canada.

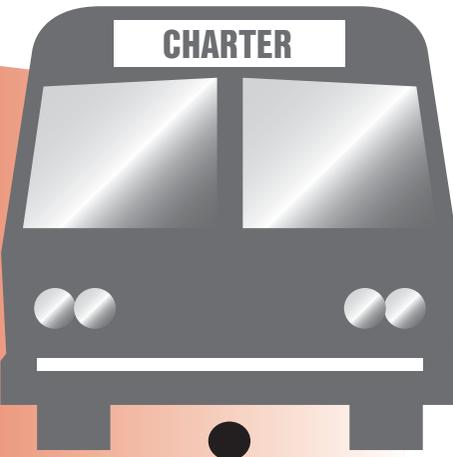
“The new Silverado Mainline schedule gives residents of rural Nevada more access to services in the Reno and Las Vegas areas, more conveniently and at lower cost,” said Tony Fiorini, senior

vice president of Silverado Stages, who was instrumental in resurrecting the service in 2014.

Also new on the Silverado Mainline are online connections with Google Transit and Apple Maps, allowing users to plan and purchase long-distance trips and providing directions to pick-up and drop-off stops.

Silverado Stages operates more than 350 motorcoaches and other passenger vehicles.

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Leaf peeping

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Connecticut are color heavyweights, too, with areas like the Berkshires in western Massachusetts, the Green Mountains of Vermont and the White Mountains of New Hampshire among many leaf-viewing hotbeds.

The challenge is knowing when and where to visit each. A general rule of thumb is that the colors move from north to south, roughly between about mid- to late-September to about mid-October.

Peak colors typically start earlier at the higher elevations and occur later at the lower elevations and in southern New England.

Some websites, including http://archive.boston.com/travel/specials/foliage_map and <https://newengland.com/seasons/fall/foliage/peak-fall-foliage-map>, offer an approximation of peak color dates in New England.

Of course, conditions vary depending on temperatures and other factors that only Mother Nature controls.

"It just depends where you are and — one day it's so-so and a week later that same section is absolutely spectacular," said Scott Riccio, president and owner of Northeast Charter & Tour Co., which operates 28 charter buses out of Lewiston, Maine.

Cruise ships touring the Northeastern coastline provide big business this time of year when passengers disembark for shoreline trips arranged by excursion companies



The Lakes Region of New Hampshire is popular for leaf-peeper tours. Some New England motorcoach operators say September and October are among their busiest times of the year because of the popularity of the fall foliage tours.

that hire companies like Riccio's to shuttle guests.

"They're here in summer," he said of the ships, "but they're really here in the fall more than anything and when they're here in the fall, they're here to see the coast, but they're here to see the foliage. That's their first priority, that's what the groups want to see is they want to see the foliage. When

they're here, it's busy."

The bulk of the ships visit Bar Harbor, which attracts scores of the vessels in September and October.

"It's a monster business for everybody," Riccio said of onshore day trips to places like Acadia or the White Mountains.

Chris Donnelly, president of Sugar Tours Inc. in West Dover, Vt., arranges multiday

New England foliage tours for motorcoach operators and visiting groups, for which his company also will arrange transportation. The company will arrange tours for about 100 groups from about Sept. 20 to Oct. 12.

"That's our busiest time," Donnelly said, adding that Vermont and New Hampshire are in high demand.

For tours in later September, trips tend to go to higher elevations in Vermont because colors are already changing there, but groups visiting around Columbus Day in early October go to the Champlain Valley or southern Vermont, where colors usually lag a week behind the other areas, he said.

"I do the same thing in New Hampshire," Donnelly said.

The Lakes Region of New Hampshire is about a week behind the White Mountains regions, he said.

Fall foliage trips are more than just looking at colors, though. Tour providers mix myriad local and regional attractions into their leaf-peeping itineraries.

The White Mountains are popular for attractions such as the Conway Scenic Railroad, Kancamagus Highway and Cannon Mountain Tram. The Lakes Region is popular for the Mount Washington cruise ships, Squam Lake cruises and Castle In The Clouds, Donnelly said.

The TravelChanel.com said the Kancamagus Highway, a 34.5-mile section of Route 112, "is renowned for its autumn leaf spectacular, making it one of the top road

CONTINUED ON PAGE 15 ►



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Leaf peeping

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14

trips to drive during the fall leaf-viewing season. As a National Scenic Byway, the ‘Kanc,’ as the locals call it, remains unspoiled by homes or service stations, allowing visitors to watch the maple, beech and birch trees burst into color without distraction.”

Vermont attractions

In northern Vermont, the Stowe-Waterbury area, home of Ben & Jerry’s, is popular, as are the state capital, Montpelier, and the Cold Hollow Cider Mill, Donnelly said. In the southern end, Hildene, the home of Robert Todd Lincoln, son of President Abraham Lincoln, is a popular destination in Manchester.

Other trips might tie in Newport, R.I., and Mystic, Conn., he said, noting Sugar Tours occur throughout New England and along the Eastern seaboard.

McGurn, the Lobster Lady, said New England is full of attractions to complement the fall foliage.

“The vineyards are beautiful that time of year as well,” she said, also noting Lake Winnepesaukee and Castle In The Clouds. “In Bar



The Kancamagus Highway, a 34.5-mile National Scenic Byway along Route 112 in New Hampshire, is considered one of the top road trips to drive during the fall leaf-viewing season.

Harbor (Maine), of course, it’s just natural, spectacular beauty from atop Cadillac Mountain” in the Acadia park.

The mountain, at 1,530 feet, is the highest point along the North Atlantic seaboard.

Northern New England

Riccio, of Northeast Charter & Tour, said the bulk of fall foliage tours tend to be in northern New England, including Maine,

New Hampshire, Vermont and Massachusetts.

“There are some southern New England tours that are included as well.

“There are some groups that want to get out to those places, but I think the bulk of it is northern New England, because that’s where the best foliage is,” he said.

Stops along the way are plentiful.

It depends where groups are,

but if they’re in Maine, they’ll travel up the coast and maybe stop at a museum, or Acadia and do a whale watch.

If they’re in New Hampshire, they can take the Cog Railway to the top of Mount Washington, the highest peak in New England at 6,288 feet, and enjoy the surrounding White Mountains, Riccio said.

Plenty to see

“There’s always a good muse-

um or a state park or something of that nature to visit,” he said. “Lots of attractions are open during the fall.”

It’s also a fun time of year to visit apple orchards or fairs, he said.

“It really just depends where the tour is and there’s always some sort of activities that take place through the day, and then when you travel from one town to the next town, there’s always foliage to be seen along the route,” Riccio said. “So you usually try to pick the roads that have the best foliage.”

“East Coast Sampler”

Brenda Tidwell, co-owner of Leisure Time Charters & Tours in Emerson, Ga., said fall colors are one of the highlights on the “East Coast Sampler” tour she arranged. The tour starts in Georgia, travels up the coast to spots like Washington, D.C., Philadelphia and the Statue of Liberty, and continues as far as Maine.

Her favorite fall location, like the Lobster Lady’s, is Boothbay Harbor, Maine.

“It’s the water, it’s the hotel we use, it’s the smallest of the towns,” Tidwell said. “It’s just a beautiful little place.”

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People

CHICAGO — *George Jacobs*, CEO of **Windy City Limousine and Bus Worldwide** has announced several key management changes, as follows:

Kathy Kahne, vice president, has been promoted to president.

Tracy Raimer, former owner of the CTG Group and Your Private Limousine, has been named executive vice president.

Jerold Bean, director of sales and special events, has been promoted to vice president of sales and marketing.

Tricia Wilcoxon, manager of the Windy City affiliate department, has been named director of business development.

Erica Shor has been named

manager of affiliate relations.

WASHINGTON — *John Bailey*, president of **Bailey Coach** in York, Pa., was among 40 small-business owners from around the country who met recently with President *Donald Trump*.

One of the themes of the meeting was how to help small businesses succeed and what the administration can do to help.

Also attending the meeting in the East Wing of the White House were *Linda McMahon*, administrator of the **Small Business Administration**; *Gen. John Kelly*, the president's chief of staff; and Trump's daughter, *Ivanka*, who owns her own business.

Bailey, a Pennsylvania member of the **National Federation of In-**

dependent Business, said part of the message the business owners delivered to Trump was that the tax code should be simplified and that small businesses shouldn't pay a higher tax rate than large corporations.

The business owners also said they would like to see more regulations from previous administrations repealed.

"Some prior administrations seemed only to want to create more regulations, even when they didn't involve safety or health, but President Trump and even his daughter *Ivanka Trump* understand business," Bailey said.

"Such pro-business support in Washington, D.C., is promising, and I left the meeting believing they want to help make us successful."



Alfonso Smokowitz of Fullington Trailways in Pennsylvania was one of more than 15 shuttle bus drivers for the Senior PGA Championship at Trump National Golf Club near Washington, D.C.

ABC-Van Hool

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

manufacturing and numerous interchangeable parts with the 45-foot version, operators can realize significant parts, as well as driver training, savings when running both models in their fleets.

ABC and Van Hool said they are committed to future-looking innovation and investments that contribute to greater control and efficiencies for their customers

and their own business strategies.

For example, plans to expand and strengthen their parts business supply chain will afford faster access to needed components for customers, Roman Cornell said.

"We envision growing our supply chain and distribution network to tightly sync with operator requirements when and where support is needed all over North America," he said.

Cornell added that technologies emerging every year truly im-

prove operational efficiency.

"ABC and Van Hool are focused on rapid technology adoption, and whenever possible being first to market with tech-driven solutions for our operators," he said.

Dane Cornell said ABC is proud and grateful to celebrate 30 years of partnership with Van Hool and expects the relationship to last.

"We look forward to continuing to serve our customers, our communities and our industry for decades to come," he said.

Montreal tourists to reach 11 million, a 50-year high

MONTREAL — Tourism Montreal estimates that 11 million tourists will visit the Canadian city this year — the most since 20 million flocked to the metropolis for Expo 67.

"We have a good first half of the summer, good trend now, and we'll have a very good result at the end of the summer," said Pierre Bellerose, vice president at Tourism Montreal.

Hotel occupancy rates were at about 87 percent in August, and

many restaurants and stores that cater to visitors reported increased sales.

Bellerose credits Montreal's 375th birthday, new attractions and multiple conventions.

Gilbert Rozon, founder of Just for Laughs and president of Montreal 375, believes Montreal is regaining its shine after several decades of hard times.

"We had every day in July over 100,000 people in the streets so a lot of them, I would say 23 to 25 percent, are tourists," Rozon said.

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Party bus

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

party bus-related deaths of 20 people across the United States.

“They climbed aboard party buses expecting a safe and fun-filled evening with friends. They never made it home,” the paper wrote.

Many of the victims fell out of moving vehicles after leaning or falling against faulty windows or doors. Two died from head injuries suffered when buses passed under bridges — one was dancing on top of a double-decker bus and another opened and poked his head out of a roof escape hatch.

One man died after intentionally opening a rear exit door and falling out of the moving bus. The door had recently passed inspection but the operator was cited for not having insurance.

“I definitely think that this should be something that’s on the Senate Transportation Committee next year to have a hearing about,” said Kansas Sen. Pat Pettey.

Running in the shadows

There are 340 licensed charter bus companies operating in Chicago, said Rosa Escareno, the city’s commissioner of business affairs and consumer protection.

“I can’t begin to tell you how



Violence and accidents on party buses have led to crackdowns in some Midwestern cities, including Chicago where authorities recently ordered 17 bus operators out of service after a three-day “enforcement action” in the city’s central business district.

many may be operating illegally,” she said.

Industry experts and a national transportation consultant told the *Star* that federal regulations are adequate but enforcement is not.

“Enforcement falls to state and federal inspectors already stretched thin monitoring millions of commercial trucks, charter buses and school buses on the nation’s roads. Inspectors seldom work late hours

on weekends, when party buses most often operate,” the paper said.

Kansas Highway Patrol Trooper Nick Wright, a transportation enforcement specialist, told the *Star*, “Ultimately it boils down to more manpower.”

The *Star*’s reporters did work late hours on weekends to keep track of party buses. Then they searched public documents for evidence of regulatory compliance.

“Every night they witnessed problematic buses operating among the legal ones,” the paper wrote in summary. “Some ran with bald tires, inoperative taillights or riders leaning precariously from windows. Some crossed state lines without the insurance coverage that federal regulators require to protect passengers and the public if something goes wrong.

“Some lacked the Department

of Transportation numbers that registered buses display. And some transported partiers even though the company has lost its credentials to operate — or never had them in the first place.”

One bus followed by the reporters traveled with the same burned-out taillight for three months.

The *Star* reported that some carriers “hide their businesses from authorities by using online booking agents to solicit customers. These websites often show generic buses, making it nearly impossible for customers to tell what company they are hiring.”

In border cities such as St. Louis and Kansas City, carriers that are not authorized to conduct interstate commerce may do so anyway, the paper reported.

“The *Star* called about 20 area companies to see how many would cross state lines even though they lacked proper insurance. All but one offered to do so.”

Chicago fire

Last month’s Chicago enforcement blitz was conducted by the Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection with the Chicago Police Department under powers strengthened by the April

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Vegas marijuana tour buses stalled by restrictive law

LAS VEGAS — The budding pot-tour industry in Las Vegas appears to be on hold because of the strict Nevada law on legalized marijuana.

Now that recreational marijuana is legal, some enterprising tour companies have started advertising pot tours, complete with visits to dispensaries and, they had hoped, buses filled with tourists sampling the state's newest crop.

That, however, was before officials stepped in to nip the tours in the, um, bud.

It seems that even though recreational marijuana use was approved by Nevada voters and took effect in July, state law prohibits people from smoking or ingesting marijuana in a moving vehicle.

"I was blindsided when I got the call," Highway Tours Las Vegas owner Michael Stevens told KVVU-TV after being informed that pot tours are against the law. "Everything I have is invested in this."

Some pot-tour operators vow to push the issue, and some have applied for permits to operate such tours.

"This idea can work anywhere, but the fact that this is Sin City will draw tourists to try something they might not have tried before," Nicholas Hogan, co-owner of GreenRush Puff Bus, told the *Las Vegas Review-Journal*.

"None of the casinos, hotels or bars will allow consuming marijuana for years, if ever," Hogan said. "The bus solves that problem by providing a safe area to consume the product in a social environment."

GreenRush Puff Bus has applied for a state permit, which is under review, according to the Nevada Transportation Authority, which regulates private bus companies and ride-hailing companies across the state.

Some tour operators tried to get around the law by taking passengers to dispensaries and then stopping at a house where they could consume the marijuana. But it apparently wasn't very popular.

"I knew it was a risky business when I started," said Stevens of Highway Tours Las Vegas. "But a party bus where you can't party just doesn't have any appeal."



Now that recreational marijuana is legal in Nevada, some enterprising Las Vegas tour companies have started advertising pot tours, complete with visits to dispensaries like the one above and, they had hoped, buses filled with tourists sampling the state's newest crop. But state law prohibits pot use in moving vehicles.

Party bus

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 17

ordinance.

In most parts of the country, the problems stem from party buses that are uninspected, uninsured and operated by unlicensed drivers. In Chicago the issue is on-board violence.

The new Chicago ordinance requires party buses carrying more than 15 passengers to be accompanied by a licensed security guard if alcohol is being consumed on-board or if the bus plans to stop at locations where alcohol is served.

The ordinance also requires operators to take affirmative steps to make sure passengers are not illegally carrying firearms or drugs.

"We saw a lot of alcohol being consumed," Anthony Riccio, chief of the Chicago Police Department's organized crime unit, said during a press conference held to announce the actions against the 17 bus companies.

"We've seen gangs actually charter some of these buses," Riccio said. "We do see a lot of problems and violence that stems from the fact that they were completely unregulated."

Chicago Alderman Emma Mitts said party buses are supposed to be for celebrations, "not potential rolling cemeteries where armed, sometimes fatal violence can break out at a moment's notice thanks to the potent mix of guns and alcohol."

Kansas City Police Sgt. Kevin Murray would like to see Missouri

authorize criminal charges against serial violators to get prosecutors more involved. And, he added, "Impounding the buses would definitely be a help. You could hold it until the company is compliant. I think that would make a huge difference."

Washington model

Some experts have pointed to the state of Washington's party bus law as a potential model for other states. The law was passed in 2015 in response to accidents seen across the country as well as the death of an 11-year-old girl in Portland in 2012.

The Washington law specifies that bus operators must hold a state operating certificate or federal operating authority. Operating a passenger carrier without one of these authorities can result in a fine of up to \$5,000.

The state defines a party bus as "any motor vehicle whose interior enables passengers to stand and circulate throughout the vehicle because seating is placed around the perimeter of the bus or is non-existent and in which food, beverages or entertainment may be provided."

If alcohol is to be consumed on a charter, someone who is at least 21 years old must obtain a liquor permit. This permit holder must "monitor and control party activities in a manner to prevent the driver from being distracted" and "assume responsibility for compliance with the terms of the special permit, including compliance with

the prohibition against furnishing liquor to minors."

The law specifies that double-decker buses must not exceed a height of 14 feet.

Chicago officials have asked Illinois legislators to amend the state's laws regulating concealed carry of weapons. Local governments may prohibit guns from being carried in government buildings and bars but not on buses.

An alderman argued that party buses are "rolling bars" that should be included in the concealed-carry exemption.

Chicago business affairs commissioner Escareno views party bus crackdowns as a means of leveling the playing field for charter operators.

"We want to help legitimate bus companies compete and thrive and operate in a safe environment," she said.

The operator of one bus caught in the 2015 St. Louis enforcement effort thanked police officers for their service. Bill Brewer's bus passed the inspection. USDOT lists his company, All About You Limos of nearby Columbia, Ill., as having legal operating authority, a satisfactory safety rating and current insurance coverage.

"We're in the business to provide safe transport and we've got to keep our vehicles up to par," Brewer told a *Post-Dispatch* reporter. "These guys that are not properly insured put us at a business disadvantage and make it unsafe for the clients."

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16-20 VMA-MCASC-CMA

Regional Meeting 2017, Hotel Roanoke, Roanoke, Va. Info: www.scmotorcoach.org/annual-meeting

25-27 Grayline Annual Conference, Loews Miami Beach Hotel, Miami, Fla. Info: www.grayline-

convention.com

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9-12 Northwest Motorcoach Association Annual Bus ROAD-EO and Conference, Olympia, Wash. Info: www.nwmotorcoach.com/meetings



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