

# MOTORCOACH EXPO 2013



The Travel Exchange Welcome Reception/Icebreaker was at the famed Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex. Delaware North Companies and Florida's Space Coast hosted a spectacular evening.



Constantine 'Gus' Zografopoulos, lower left, of the Kostas Z Foundation and a member of the advisory board of the Open Doors Organization, assisted Godfrey LeBron, of Paradise Travel in New York, standing left, with an Americans with Disabilities Act briefing and demonstration on the show floor.



UMA President and CEO Victor Parra and NTA President Lisa Simon welcomed attendees to an overflow luncheon that featured 20 leading Broadway performers, presenting songs from their shows. They gave standing-ovation performances.



Florida Highway Patrol Trooper Kevin Nelms, center in uniform, conducted a bus inspection, using CVSA criteria, on the Expo show floor. A lift allowed Nelms to show how he inspects brakes.

## Feedback Wanted

Both UMA and NTA want suggestions for improving next year's Motorcoach Expo and NTA Convention at Travel Exchange in Los Angeles. UMA members can email their suggestions to [info@uma.org](mailto:info@uma.org). UMA also is sending a survey to its operator attendees. NTA members can provide input via an email sent to [NTAHeadquarters@ntastaff.com](mailto:NTAHeadquarters@ntastaff.com).



Barac Wimbert of Travel Lovers Tours & Cruises in St. Petersburg, Fla., tries his hand at Indy Car driving, using a high-tech simulator in the Firestone-Bridgestone booth at Expo.

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# New incentive for checking Safer system data: \$25,000 fine

ORLANDO, Fla. — Motorcoach company owners and managers who don't keep close tabs on the information about their companies that appears in the U.S. Department of Transportation SAFER system are setting themselves up for some pretty hefty financial headaches.

Ken Presley, vice president of the United Motorcoach Association, told operators attending the UMA Motorcoach Expo here last month that the data for many of their businesses are inaccurate and the errors could lead to intrusive scrutiny by regulators and ultimately to loss of operating authority.

And, he stressed, running without valid operating authority now carries a mandatory \$25,000 per occurrence (per trip/per day) fine, large enough to put some of them out of business.

"If you make any changes to your business profile with FMCSA, you really need to check the SAFER information to make sure everything (on the website) is accurate," he stressed during an UMA Expo session on regulatory and legislative issues that impact the motorcoach industry.

Presley said the data on the

SAFER system needs to be updated just about every time something occurs that affects the company. Such actions, he said, range from altering the name or address of the company, to missing a required regulatory filing, to making a late insurance premium payment.

"Forget something and you could be placed out of service," he warned.

Presley elaborated after the meeting that weekly checks of the system by operators should be made under normal circumstances and daily reviews are needed if a company is having any issues with its insurance provider or filings. Take nothing for granted, he said.

Presley also said insurance issues appear to be the main cause of the inaccuracies on the feds' website, noting that if an operator is late with its premium payment, the insurance company could issue a cancellation notice, which is sent to not only the operator, but the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration as well.

"At that point FMCSA starts the revocation process," he noted, adding that if the premium is subsequently paid and the insurance is reinstated or rewritten, the opera-



Loretta Bitner

William Bronrott



Ken Presley

Becky Weber

tor needs to make sure the filing with the SAFER system is made prior to the effective day of the revocation.

Do not automatically assume everything is fine just because you made your insurance installment payment.

He said if the payment is not made until after the cancellation takes effect, the operator needs to apply for reinstatement of its operating authority and must not operate for a minimum of 48 hours or until the authority is reinstated.

"Eventually, some poor guy is going to get stuck with a \$25,000 mandatory fine. Can anyone help? No, because the fine is mandatory," he said.

Presley said the speedy out-of-service action by FMCSA and the stiff fine for operating without valid authority are the byproducts of the government's efforts to weed out illegal carriers and other non-compliant operations.

"Frankly, this is what you get when you crack down on rogues. Everyone is subject to the rules, even well-intentioned, otherwise compliant, operators," he added.

Presley's call for regularly checking of the SAFER data received a strong endorsement from FMCSA officials, who delivered the same message to a group of operators at a session held in conjunction with Motorcoach Expo.

"Don't assume your information is all good," Loretta G. Bitner, chief of the agency's commercial passenger safety division, warned members of the National Association of Motorcoach Operators. "You could be running without operating authority and not even know about it."

Operators can make a check of

their SAFER system records by visiting [www.safer.org](http://www.safer.org). It is advisable to check every aspect of the system, paying particular attention to the insurance section.

Presley also warned operators that federal regulators are stepping up their safety enforcement efforts, meaning operators should be prepared to see many more inspections than they have in the past; particularly this summer when once again the FMCSA will likely be checking tires.

Meantime, UMA lobbyist Becky Weber told operators the industry scored big with the passage by Congress last year of the highway and transportation reauthorization bill, commonly known as MAP-21.

"It was a major victory for our industry," she said, citing continued safeguards provided by the charter service rule to protect private carriers from competition from public transit agencies, a call for transit agencies to work more closely with private motorcoach operators, and the preservation of the partial diesel fuel tax exemption that bus owners enjoy.

FMCSA Deputy Administrator

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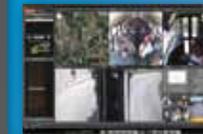
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# Industry standouts are recognized at Motorcoach Expo

ORLANDO, Fla. — The motorcoach industry's top honors were handed out at UMA Motorcoach Expo at Travel Exchange here last month, with seven major awards going to companies and individuals who were recognized for their achievements.

One operator, Peter Shelbo of Tour West America in Phoenix, went home with two awards.

The motorcoach industry's best and brightest, along with those receiving awards from NTA, were honored at a variety of Expo and NTA Convention at Travel Exchange events, including the Awards Reception and Dinner, the UMA Active Member Meeting, the Broadway Lunch, and the new closing day UMA-NTA joint luncheon sponsored by Norwegian Cruise Lines.

UMA Expo, and now Travel Exchange, is the premier industry event for honoring motorcoach industry stars, and the Awards Reception and Banquet was the social highlight of the exposition, with its reception, dinner, awards program, after-dinner cordials, cigars, games and dancing.

The ultimate awards given at Expo are the twin UMA Vision Awards.

The awards recognize a pair of companies — a large and a small operator — that have established high standards of performance, raising the bar in all areas — marketing, maintenance, operations, safety and innovation.

**The UMA Vision Award/Small Operator** (15 or fewer coaches) went to Shelbo and Tour West America.

Tour West and Shelbo were described as setting new standards of performance and reliability for a small operator, working to improve the business by participating in a Spader 20 Group, and supporting the wider industry through its involvement in the Motorcoach Marketing Council.

In accepting the award, Shelbo noted he enrolled in a Spader Group in 2006 and "it has brought us countless opportunities to better ourselves."

Among those he thanked for their support was Lancer Insurance. "Thank you, Lancer, for watching over us for 26 years."

**The UMA Vision Award/Large Operator** (more than 15 coaches) went to John Walker and Star Shuttle & Charter in San Antonio, Texas.

Star is a 20-year-old, family-owned company that has a diversified operation, fleet and range of services, plus a strong commitment to individuals with disabilities.

Not only does it operate conventional motorcoach charters,



Allen Lamers accepts award from MCI's Pat Ziska

airport transfers, Gray Line tours, sports team moves, field trips, business and senior outings, conventions, weddings and graduations, but its Abbey Walker Executive Cars and Limousines unit provides black car and stretch-limo services, ranging from proms to parties to pampered executives. Its combined fleet totals 250 vehicles.

But what particularly sets Star Shuttle apart is its transit and paratransit contract services for public transit agencies and other groups and organizations.

Walker told Expo attendees the company provides mobility impaired services for 3,000 individuals daily. For Star and Walker, ADA is a way of business.

"We deliver mobility and freedom to people," he said.

Other awards presented at Expo:

**UMA Safety Leader:** June Bratcher of Daisy Charters & Shuttles/Daisy Tours, another San Antonio-based operator.

The safety leader award is sponsored and selected by the Daecher Consulting Group and honors an individual or organization that has been instrumental in accomplishing innovative or beneficial safety achievements for their company or the industry.

In presenting the award, Matthew Daecher noted that Bratcher's company is perhaps the only motorcoach operation of its size that has two dedicated safety positions.

In addition to a safety director, Daisy also has a manager of over-the-road safety. Between the two, they hire all new drivers, check driver performance with both a shadow driver program and Smart-Drive video recording system, monitor pre-trip inspections, maintain the company drug and alcohol policy, keep the company up to date on new regulations, and recommend safety technologies when they become available.

Daecher said the company has invested heavily in safety technology.

But beyond that, safety is embedded into every aspect of the Daisy operation and every employee. Safety is even part of every job description.

The sales staff checks times, schedules and itineraries to assure they are well within federal hours-of-service rules, dispatchers make sure drivers have received their required off-duty time between trips. Drivers have a say in routes, relief points and timing.

Staff mechanics handle all preventative maintenance and have authority to pull coaches out of service if they consider it necessary.

The company's safety culture stems from company founder Bratcher. Before starting her company in 1980, she was a registered nurse.

Daisy has a fleet of 25 coaches and has a second location in Corpus Christi, Texas.

**UMA Green Highway Award:** The award, which was established in 2008 and is sponsored by Motor Coach Industries, recognizes companies that demonstrate organizational leadership in reducing carbon emissions and a commitment to "environmental stewardship" — internally, externally and industrywide.

Companies are recognized for implementing policies to conserve energy in their operations, offices and maintenance facilities.

This year's award — presented by MCI executive Pat Ziska — went to Lamers Bus Lines of Green Bay, Wis.

The company was cited for its commitment to green travel; internal recycling program, and use of a driver simulator, substantially reducing on-the-road training and energy usage.

The award was accepted by Allen Lamers, who with his brother, Kevin, manage the company founded by their late father, Lyle, 68 years ago.



Peter Shelbo



John Walker



Jane Bratcher



Ralph Young



Dave Meyerhofer



Dan Diepert

**The UMA Maintenance Interchange Maintenance Competition** was conducted for the seventh consecutive year as part of UMA Motorcoach Expo. Those individuals attending the Interchange were invited to participate in a competition involving a written test and a timed diagnostic inspection.

The competition was conducted at Escot Bus Lines' facility in Orlando.

This year's champion was Dave Meyerhofer of Kobussen Trailways in Kaukauna, Wis.

Meyerhofer was a runner up at UMA Motorcoach Expo 2012 in Long Beach, Calif.

He was presented with a plaque and took home \$500.

The UMA Maintenance Interchange and maintenance competition is ably and effectively coordinated by Kevin Whitworth of Whitworth Bus Sales in Dayton, Ohio. This year's Interchange was the 16th such event.

Two awards were presented at a new Expo/Travel Exchange event, a joint luncheon with NTA, sponsored by Norwegian Cruise Line:

**Metro Magazine Motorcoach Operator of the Year:** Ralph Young of Young Transportation in Asheville, N.C.

The award is given annually to an individual or individuals who have made significant contributions to their organization, as well as the industry. It was the 23rd time the magazine has given the award.

Young was honored both for his service to the industry, as well as his record to managing a company that was founded by his father 73 years ago.

Young currently is serving his sixth term as president of the North Carolina Motorcoach Association and is a long-time member

of the board of the United Motorcoach Association. He also is a member of the North Carolina Transportation Hall of Fame.

Young Transportation operates a fleet of 55 motorcoaches.

The award was announced by Metro Associate Publisher Mark Hollenbeck.

**BUSRide Motorcoach Industry Achievement Award:** Peter Shelbo of Tour West America.

In announcing the winner, BUSRide Editor David Hubbard cited Tour West's varied and extensive tour programs of the southwestern U.S., as well as Shelbo's entrepreneurial drive.

Twenty-seven years ago, Shelbo, who had been in the restaurant business, was out of a job. He borrowed \$2,000 from his sister to buy a broken down bus and a broken down company in one of the hottest places on Earth, Yuma, Ariz.

Over the years he twice came close to bankruptcy, but through hard work — fighting the fight, fighting fairly, giving back, managing and working with passion, Shelbo built Tour West into a respected company, operating 15 motorcoaches and a pair of mid-size buses.

He says anyone following those same precepts will do "very, very well," adding that he has long believed in the saying "the harder you work, the luckier you get."

Among the awards presented by NTA, one went to long-time motorcoach operator Dan Dipert of Dan Dipert Tours in Arlington, Texas.

He received the NTA Pioneer Award, which recognizes individuals whose accomplishments have resulted in a significant change in the travel industry that benefited NTA and its members.

# Operators urged to keep tabs on states; what's a bus?

ORLANDO, Fla. — While motorcoach operators across the country usually keep a close watch for new federal regulations that could impact their businesses, they need to pay as much attention to what their state governments are up to as well.

And, they should be prepared to call out state lawmakers and regulators when they see something they don't like.

That's the advice operators heard at the annual State Association Summit, which opened the UMA Motorcoach Expo here last month.

"You have to be politically engaged with your elected state officials," said Godfrey LeBron, president of the Bus Association of New York and vice president of New York-based Paradise Travel.

"If we're not going to be there to tell our story, then who will?" LeBron asked.

He urged operators to become even more active in their state, provincial and regional motorcoach associations, and to support the activities of those groups. Failing to get involved, he warned, could result in new rules and regulations that could not only burden individ-

ual operators, but the entire industry.

"At the end of the day, you really need to take care of the state associations," he stressed.

His remarks came during a nearly two-hour session in which operators delivered a mixed review of important industry-related issues they face across the country.

Some reported on continuing problems with regulations in their states, while others told of successes they have had with theirs.

Top of mind for many operators was the need for the adoption of a national definition of motorcoaches, which they said would ease the confusion of which road rules — truck or bus or both — they need to follow as they travel across the country.

Many states consider motorcoaches trucks, while others have developed separate categories and driving rules for motorcoaches.

"Are we a bus or a truck?" asked Jim Pitstick of Tri-City Charter of Bossier City (La.), and president of the South Central Motorcoach Association, which represents Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi and Arkansas.

He said drivers regularly face



ABA Chairman Tom JeBran of Trans-Bridge Lines reports on developments in New Jersey

confusion when they see highway signs directing all trucks to stop at scales, to stay out of high-speed lanes or drive only in the right lanes.

"It's very confusing and we really need something national, uniformity," he said.

Alan Robinson of Atlanta-based R&W Motorcoach agreed and warned that in Georgia some cities are taking advantage of the confusion and targeting motorcoaches that violate truck rules,

particularly a rule that prohibits trucks from driving in the left lane on some multi-lane highways.

"The signs don't say 'Buses Excluded' and small city cops are coming on to the Interstates and ticketing motorcoaches," he noted.

Gladys Gillis of Starline Luxury Coaches in Seattle said operators in Washington and throughout the Pacific Northwest also are pushing for uniformity or parity for their coaches, too, but with transit buses rather than trucks.

She said transit buses have been given free access to the toll roads that opened in the Seattle area recently, while motorcoaches have to pay the tolls.

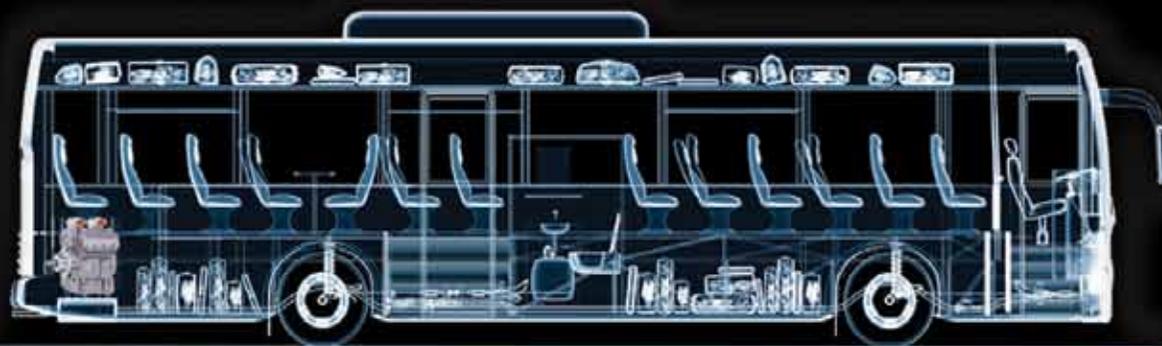
Additionally, she said transit buses also have special "Bus Only" highway lanes on some freeways that are off limits to motorcoaches.

"We want parity with the transit buses," she said. "It ought not matter what color the bus is, it's a bus."

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# FMCSA will seek operator input on ADA regulations

ORLANDO, Fla. — Although the federal rules for providing commercial bus service to passengers with physical disabilities have been around for 14 years, motorcoach operators are going to get one more chance to tell regulators what they think of some of them.

Operators attending UMA Motorcoach Expo here last month were told by officials of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration they are developing a list of specific questions about the rules they plan to submit to them for comments.

And, they said, they want to hear from operators and others in the industry from throughout the country.

“Don’t miss your opportunity to comment,” Loretta G. Bitner, chief of the FMCSA commercial passenger safety division, stressed during the UMA Expo State Association Summit. “Let your perspective be part of the process.”

To emphasize the importance of industry participation, she repeated her message again later at another meeting that was held in conjunction with the UMA Expo.

“We want to hear from you because when it’s over, it’s over,” she told a general session of the National Association of Motorcoach Operators. “Let your voice be heard.”

Bitner said the questions have yet to be completed and she was not sure when they will be ready to

be submitted to operators.

This latest effort by federal regulators to involve the motorcoach industry in the comment process is a requirement of the Americans with Disabilities Act, which became law in 1990. ADA rules applying to the motorcoach industry were adopted in 1998 and began being applied to the industry in October 2000.

The law became fully applicable to the motorcoach industry last October and mandated that large, fixed-route operators — those with gross transportation revenues of more than \$9.3 million annually — have 100 percent of the coaches in their fleets wheelchair accessible.

While smaller fixed-route and

demand-response carriers do not have to have fully accessible fleets, they must be able to accommodate disabled passengers, either with their own wheelchair-accessible buses or wheelchair-accessible coaches they obtain from other carriers.

Bitner emphasized that FMCSA is stepping up enforcement of bus ADA regulations and is hiring more inspectors to conduct audits of both large and small carriers. At last count, she said, 185 bus company ADA audits had been conducted.

She said that while the agency does not have the authority to fine carriers that violate the ADA rules — its authority is limited to placing a company out of service —

the U.S. Department of Justice can issue civil fines.

“And all of our investigations are turned over to the DOJ,” she noted.

A number of operators accused of violating ADA rules have been hit with fines by the DOJ. Among them were a Boston operator who had to pay a \$10,000 penalty to the government and another \$10,000 to a disabled customer whose trip — that was reserved four months in advanced — was canceled.

While Bitner noted that FMCSA is getting tough on motorcoach operators who ignore the ADA rules, the agency’s main goal is to see that everyone becomes compliant.

“We’ll look and see if you’ve made a good effort to comply, but aren’t quite there yet, and if you have, then we’ll work with you to help you get there,” she said.

“But, if you’ve made no effort at all, then we will take away your operating authority.”

And, she added, operators who get caught running without valid authority can be fined up to \$25,000 per day per trip.

“That can be very serious,” she said.

## Bad data

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 19

William A. Bronrott joined in the praise of MAP-21, as well, noting that it raised the safety bar for the motorcoach industry. Important measures in the legislation, he said, included written exams and safety audits for new motorcoach companies, stepped up enforcement of unfit carriers, and a mandate for electronic logging devices

by drivers.

He said FMCSA is zeroing in this year on a wide range of safety issues, including driver fatigue, sleep apnea and development of a national registry of medical doctors certified to perform physicals on drivers.

Bronrott also called on the motorcoach industry to join in the government’s fight against human trafficking by bringing the issue to the attention of drivers through

awareness training that will help them recognize indicators of the crime and how to report suspected traffickers and victims.

As many as 300,000 American children are believed to be victims of human trafficking every year, including many of whom are forced to work as prostitutes.

USDOT, which believes the travel industry is a key link in rescuing victims, already has trained its 55,000 employees and 20,000

contractors and has been working with the airline and railroad industries to broaden the training.

Victor Parra, president and chief executive of UMA, said the motorcoach industry group is aware of the problems and is willing to help in the fight.

“UMA is very much committed to do whatever it can to address this terrible situation,” he said.

Information is available at [www.dot.gov/stophumantrafficking](http://www.dot.gov/stophumantrafficking).

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# Planning to survive the aftermath of a serious crash

ORLANDO, Fla. — Although no one at a motorcoach company expects one of its coaches to be involved in a serious accident, planning for one might be the best — and possibly the only — way for a coach operator to survive one.

A carefully developed plan, detailing what every employee needs to know and do in the early hours following an accident, can help limit damaging publicity and possible costly legal challenges that could scar the company for years, Lancer Insurance executives Robert Crescenzo and Paul Berne told operators at a UMA Motorcoach Expo workshop here last month.

“Everyone must be involved from top management on down,” emphasized Crescenzo.

And, once an accident management plan is in place, he suggested that at least once yearly the company should test its plan by simulating a crisis.

Crescenzo said the plan should include an extensive list of instructions, ranging from identifying a company spokesperson, to working closely with families of passengers, to keeping the business running as smoothly as possible during the crisis.

Tops among the early action steps contained in such a plan, he said, is for the company to immediately alert its insurance carrier so insurance representatives can assist the motorcoach operator in working through the crisis.

“The longer you try to manage the situation alone, the more complex things become, and the sooner you call the insurance company, the more support you are going to get,” he stressed.

Crescenzo said the motorcoach company principals should be prepared to be questioned by the media and rather than refusing to comment, they should say only that the company is in the process

of gathering the information about the incident and is cooperating fully with authorities.

They should make sure, though, that they do not pass on or comment on any information they might be uncertain about or appears unclear to them.

In addition, he suggested that because anyone at the company might answer a telephone call from a reporter, each employee should know to immediately refer the caller to the spokesperson and not make any comments about the accident or the company themselves.

Berne cautioned, too, that although the first instinct of the mo-

torcoach operator might be to go to the scene of the accident, they should check first with the insurance company representative before doing so.

“You could mess things up,” he cautioned, adding that everything they do and say could become part of some legal action. “When any litigation starts, the lawyers look at everything.”

He said the company should immediately initiate a document freeze and instruct employees not to destroy any company documents.

“A missing document can be very dangerous,” he said, pointing out that the court or jury in a lawsuit can consider a document that might

have been destroyed as evidence against the motorcoach company.

Crescenzo said the person at the company who has been assigned to work with the passengers and their families should be authorized to provide them transportation.

“And only use alternative transportation that is as good as or better than your own company,” he recommended.

Also important, he said, is making sure employees not actively involved in the crisis, stay on their jobs so the company can continue to operate as normally as possible.

“You have to keep the company running and some people with ongoing business roles,” he added.

## State summit

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In Oregon, motorcoach operators are facing more inspections of their buses and regulators now are conducting them at weigh stations, a major sore point for operators.

“They certainly should not be doing inspections while we’re on the road,” said Joseph Gillis of NW Navigator Luxury Coaches in Portland. “There are hundreds of

places where we’re OK with inspections, but not on the road.”

Operators also were warned that drivers continue to find bottlenecks and lengthy delays along several Canada and U.S. border crossings, especially in Detroit.

“It can be very, very difficult, especially with hours of service issues,” said Larry Hundt of Great Canadian Holidays and Coaches in Kitchener, Ontario.

While many of the reports

from operators were not the best of news, several told the group that there were no significant problems in their states and others even delivered some good news.

In California, operators are being relieved of the responsibility of making sure that underage passengers on their party buses do not consume alcohol. The burden is being shifted to the passengers with charter customers required to commit to keeping underage indi-

viduals in their group from drinking.

Legislation also is being advanced in New Jersey that will exempt motorcoach operators who travel to Atlantic City at least once a week from having to pay highway tolls, while in Connecticut a new Web page makes it easier for operators to bid for state jobs and, depending on their size, they even get special credits that increase their chances of winning a bid.

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# Overlooked key to success: Monitoring your own company

ORLANDO, Fla. — You've heard of secret shoppers visiting restaurants, grocery stores, movie theaters and other businesses to see how well customers are being treated.

Well, they can work well in the motorcoach industry, too, suggests Timothy Stout, president of Stout's Transportation Services in Trenton, N.J.

Appearing here last month on a UMA Motorcoach Expo panel discussion of basic business practices, Stout said operators could learn a great deal about their own businesses by using secret shoppers posing as potential charter-or-tour customers.

"Do it and you will be surprised," he promised.

He told of an operator who had 30 secret shopper calls placed to a company seeking information and pricing for a possible charter. Of those, only 3 percent of the callers were asked if they wanted to book the trip, and just 42 percent received follow-up calls inquiring if a decision had been made on a possible booking.

"You really should secret shop yourself," he stressed.



Lorna Hundt of Great Canadian Holidays gestures, as Timothy Stout and Ronald Bast look on.

Stout, who was joined on the panel by Lorna Hundt of Great Canadian Holidays and Coaches in Kitchener, Ontario, and Ronald R. Bast of GO Riteway Transportation Group in Richfield, Wis., said operators also should regularly revisit their pricing and not be reluctant to increase their rates when necessary.

"You need to know what your prices should be, not what someone else's prices are," he emphasized.

Stout said rate increases he put in place at his own company recently resulted in a loss of some business, but produced an increase in revenue. "We now run less buses, but for more money," he said.

Operators also should be on the lookout for diversity in their rate schedules and explore such tools as seasonal and demand pricing.

Bast suggested that operators fearful of federal and state regulatory inspections can ease their

concerns by conducting their own internal reviews and audits every 6 to 12 months. He said in-house audits will turn up issues and potential problems that can be addressed before they are uncovered by regulators.

"What little you do now is going to be a lot cheaper than when the regulators come marching through the door," he said.

Hundt suggested, too, that operators should not be afraid to walk

away from customers who they find to be too difficult to work with or to please.

"It's OK not to work with a bad customer," she said.

Stout agreed, adding that in some cases it is much better to "fire" a customer than try to continue to work with them.

Hundt also pointed out the importance of making certain company goals are passed on to all employees so everyone is keenly aware of the mission and is willing to work to help fulfill it.

"It is very good to make sure we're all on board and working together," she added.

Stout highlighted the need for business owners and their management team to continually encourage employees to believe they are part of the team no matter what their jobs.

This can be accomplished, he suggested, by sharing with them more information about the company, particularly the price of new buses, and the cost of insurance, fuel and maintenance expenses.

"And, we need to hire people who are smarter than us," added Bast.

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# Growing faith-based travel sector is seen as priority

ORLANDO, Fla. — Speakers and participants attending a forum conducted during the annual NTA Convention at Travel Exchange here last month said the \$18 billion faith-based travel market continues to grow and NTA should continue to play a role in fostering that growth.

The forum provided an opportunity for faith-based travel leaders from across the U.S. to connect and offer ideas on how NTA can help the segment expand.

Paul C. Larsen, president of Rochester, Minn.-based Ed-Ventures Inc. and chair of the NTA's faith-based Tourism Advisory Council,

said the market has a centuries-old legacy, as well as a bright future.

"One reason it's growing is that while the economy hasn't been great for the last four years, with the faith-based traveler, the dollar isn't necessarily the first criteria when they travel," he said.

"It has an impact but it's not the first criteria, so it has withstood the last four years better than other areas of travel."

According to the NTA (formerly the National Tour Association), about 40 percent of the group's 700 tour-operator members report some involvement in faith-based travel.

Generally, from a travel industry perspective, "faith-based tourism" is broadly defined.

Participants at the forum said it can apply to travelers of various faiths, spiritual traditions and philosophies, such as Christianity, Judaism, Islamism, Buddhism, Hinduism, New Age and belief in the ancient gods, and it can encompass a wide range of destinations and activities.

"Sometimes faith-based travel is just about the fellowship," said Larsen. "Sometimes, pastors travel to build those relationships. Sometimes it can be about pilgrimages."

Debby Micale of Master's

Touch Christian Charter Services and Tours in Prescott Valley, Ariz., offered a pair of examples of the diversity of faith-based travel.

"We do a lot of tours in the West, and we give a creation viewpoint of the Grand Canyon," she said.

On another Master's Touch trip, visitors toured the former home of Elvis Presley in Palm Springs, Calif., and met an Elvis impersonator. "He read a scripture and played one of the songs he wrote in that house," Micale said.

Her husband, UMA member Warren Micale, suggested the NTA create a faith-based tourism data-

base or website containing ideas for destinations and suppliers, along with general information about the world's religions.

"With us, we're in contact with chambers of commerce, and they avoid faith anything. It's politically incorrect for them to tell us here are these faith-based resources in their communities," he said.

The lack guidance and help means it's difficult to put together faith-based itineraries when basic information isn't readily available.

And getting the information and learning about local resources is "only going to happen when members are willing to give input from their areas. If we can work together, we can create a better faith-based tour," said Micale.

Other recommendations from forum participants included:

- A quarterly newsletter for faith-based tourism companies, suppliers and destinations
- Webinars on success stories
- A branded "how-to" series for the faith-based market with information on marketing and gaining trust among religious leaders
- Partner-to-partner exchange opportunities exclusively for the faith-based market

## Operators offer ideas for bettering business

ORLANDO, Fla. — Looking for new business?

Folks in the travel and tour industries can help each other drum up more business simply by getting to know each other better, suggest two motorcoach operators.

That was the message Paul Nakamoto of Super Sightseeing Tours in San Francisco and Larry Hundt of Great Canadian Holidays and Coaches in Kitchener, Ontario, delivered here last month while serving on a UMA Motorcoach Expo panel

on finding new growth markets.

Nakamoto told those on the destination and attractions side that motorcoach operators know where their coaches are at all times and one of them filled with potential customers could be passing by their restaurant, hotel or attraction at any time.

"They are your greatest resource and you need to get to know them," he said.

Hundt said motorcoach operators can bolster their business and

increase the value of their companies by hooking up with tour operators, including exposing their charter groups to them.

"Good coach companies should partner with tour operators."

Hundt said tour operators could be further helped because motorcoach operators are experts on knowing the areas they serve, including hotels, restaurants and attractions that are friendly to tour bus groups.

Nakamoto suggested, too, that

motorcoach operators could help sell tours by allowing their business, club or other organization tour groups to put their names on the outside of the buses they are using for their tours. "It's a pretty good idea that works," he added.

Hundt also urged motorcoach operators to continually look for niche markets to serve, including gay and lesbian organizations, wine and culinary clubs, and other special interest groups.

"The list can be quite endless."



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# Getting the most out of your marketing dollars

ORLANDO, Fla. — Tour operators can turn a financially middling tour into a highly profitable one using one of the simplest, least-expensive and most-effective marketing tools: the postcard.

“Don’t you hate it when you have 26 people, and it’s profitable but not great?” asks Autumn Dipert Brown, chief operating officer of Dan Dipert Coaches and Tours.

She says sending postcards to people who’ve expressed interest in a destination can add the six or seven passengers that can make the difference.

That’s one of dozens of practical ideas about marketing that Brown shared with tour-and-charter operators and other travel professionals at a concurrent education session during UMA Motorcoach Expo at Travel Exchange here last month.

Brown said a good place to start is with an annual calendar marked with all the brochures, email blasts and other marketing and advertising items a company might want to use. The next step, she said, is to formulate a marketing budget to determine what’s feasible to implement.

Drawing on her 17-year career at the Arlington, Texas-based coach-and-tour company and experience as chair of the Motorcoach Marketing Council, she estimated that a charter company should budget about 1 percent of its sales to marketing and advertising.

That’s \$10,000 for a company with \$1 million in sales, or \$25,000 for one with \$2.5 million. In contrast, a tour company should budget about 4 percent of sales to its market-



Autumn Dipert Brown

ing and advertising, or about \$40,000 for a tour company with \$1 million in revenue, or \$100,000 for one with \$2.5 million, she said.

Here’s some of what Brown said works — and doesn’t work — for her company’s coach division, along with her comments:

**Tracking lead sources.** “Track it monthly. That’s really important. During the sales process, if you’re not asking, ‘Where did you hear about us,’ then you’re losing a great piece of information to make your \$10,000, or \$25,000, or \$50,000 (marketing) investment work. If you don’t know why people are calling you, you don’t know whether the money you’re spending is worth it.”

**Email blasts using Constant Contact, MailChimp or other tools.** “Those are highly productive. They’re very inexpensive. They’re really, really productive.... We’ve found that we’ve had a whole lot of views and a whole lot of click-throughs (individu-

als actually looking at the electronic communication).”

**Community involvement.** “This year, I had a couple of (used) buses that I couldn’t sell. I tried everything and I just couldn’t sell them. So, we gave them away (to local non-profit agencies)...The cool thing about that, we thought when we give this bus away, we’re going to have to paint it and we’re going to have to buy new tires from Firestone.

“When we called (Firestone) and asked about buying new tires because we’re giving this bus away, they said, ‘Oh, you’re giving it away? Take the tires.’...The paint shop said we’ll paint it for free.

“The other things we do are ads in the local theater programs and signs on baseball fields and the Soroptimist Club and that kind of thing.”

**Stationery/Envelopes/Business Cards.** “(T)hose really don’t return you much but they are important. A lot of people will scrimp on stationery because they don’t think it’s important. But people do notice if you have a really nice logo and the paper is really nice.”

**Cable advertising.** “(O)ne that we won’t do again is cable advertising. We did a big production and we thought we’d get some business out of it. We got a whole lot of people that we already knew call and say I saw your promotion, but we got nobody that we didn’t know that called and said ‘I need a coach.’ So that’s not effective, and it was big bucks.”

**Search Engine Optimization.** “I just don’t get it. Until I get it, I’m not going to invest in it again. We spent a lot of money

and did not improve our web traffic at all.”

Here are some of her ideas about marketing the tours division:

**Annual catalog.** “When you’re doing these promos, before you decide on the format, ask about the postage. Sometimes it’s just the tiniest change — the paper, the number of pages — will change the postage by 20 or 30 percent. It’s amazing.”

**Valpak.** “The jury’s still out on that one. We just did one in December and we got calls, so call me in a year and I’ll tell you if it panned out. We did get a lot of calls. One of the hardest things is to get new blood. It’s really easy to churn your current database but it’s hard to get new names. So we decided to do the Valpak to try to get new names.”

**Email blasts.** “Very effective but only half of a percent of our total budget. It’s really something you can’t ignore these days.”

**Free tours.** “(W)e decided we’ll just do a tour and the only people who can come are people who have never gone with us, or they’re somebody who has gone with us but their friend hasn’t and they bring their friend.

“We wanted the new people because they are so hard to find, right? They were very successful. We’ve done six or seven busloads of people on one-day free tours.

“The total cost to us was about \$300 to \$350 per bus, and they’re relatively full. So, you’re talking about less than \$10 per person for a live lead with a behind in a seat that you can talk to all day long. That is worth way more than \$7.50 a person, right? We’re not taking them 400 miles away. We’re taking them to the other side of the country.

## Knowledge is critical to successful online marketing

ORLANDO, Fla. — Here’s a reality check for coach operators who want to use online marketing to boost business: Most people type “party bus” into Google when they want to charter a motorcoach — not “motorcoach rental,” not “charter bus,” but “party bus.”

“And 90 percent of the time, they are not looking for a stripper pole. They are looking for a charter bus,” said Chris Riddell, at the Online Marketing session at the UMA Motorcoach EXPO here last month.

Riddell’s fellow panelists for the education session included Eric Elliott of BusRates.com, and Lisa Peterson of Northfield Lines in Minnesota.

That’s important because knowing what potential customers are looking for when they go online — and how best to provide that information, whether it’s through company websites, email newsletters or apps — is key to success in online marketing, according to the panelists.

But how can operators, who might not know a SEO from a CEO, develop the right online strategy for their companies?

How can they market their companies using Pinterest, the virtual photo pinboard that lets people organize and share photos from the web?

Or, improve their companies’ websites using new technologies like “heat mapping,” which tracks how visitors view websites?

The panelists and informed operators in the audience offered answers to those questions and more. Here’s some of what they said:

On getting started with online marketing: Gene Wright of B&W Charters in Kalamazoo, Mich., offered a testimonial, of sorts. He said he worked with Elliott shortly after the 2012 UMA Expo to develop a simple email template, and start marketing on Twitter and Facebook.

“The issue with me is that my sales staff is me. Not everybody has a large company or the manpower to do a lot,” Wright said.

“These things that you’re not used to can be rather daunting, but it doesn’t have to be that way. You can get it done whether you have a large or small operation.”

**On how customers can use a smartphone application, or app:** Shawn Geary of McCoy Bus Service and Tours in Kingston, Ontario, said he recently invested in a custom app, GoMcCoy, that lets customers link directly to the company website.

“The theory is that if we can get the customers to download the app, the next time they think of a bus, or somebody suggests we should look into getting a bus for that field trip, they can say well, ‘I’ve got a McCoy app right on my phone here. I can just tap it and ask them to send us a quote.’

“It just all of a sudden puts you ahead of your competition as far as top of mind,” Geary said.

**On how to follow the rules about sending broadcast emails:** “You can send emails to people who want to receive them as long as you give them the opportunity to opt out, and as long as you give them a very clear set of information, a physical address, and the



Chris Riddell

ability to say I do not want to receive emails from you any longer. And you have to honor those rules,” Riddell said.

**On how to create an email newsletter:** Peterson said her company’s monthly newsletter usually contains a top story on a new vehicle, a new employee or an employee in a new position, and two profiles of drivers.

“These are the faces of our company. We see them in the office and we see them with their uniforms on and we see them on the road, but these guys have the most awesome lives.

“And then, just for fun, I feature a recipe. I like to eat. It’s the most popular feature. I keep it at the bottom, then you have to scroll through the whole thing,” she said.

**On how to create an email marketing campaign:** “What we’ve found with our clients is that a lot of our bookings were for the very same groups all the time....If you have

somebody who’s a corporate traveler, it may never occur to them to use it for a family reunion. It may never occur to them to grab 20 friends and go to a football game. We built this entire campaign on what (else) you can do, and we saw open rates into the 30 percents, which for an unsolicited marketing email is remarkable,” Riddell said.

**On how to use “heat map tracking” technology at Crazy Egg and other sites that track where people click on a website:** “At BusRates, we track every time someone clicks on any button on our site. We want that data so we can understand is there something that we need to (change),” Elliott said.

“That same theory transfers to you. If you have a request-a-quote button at the bottom right hand corner just above the fold on your website, try moving it up. Do a little testing to see where you’re getting more traction.”

**On how to use Pinterest to market a company:** Elliot advised operators to ask drivers to take photos of charter-bus groups alongside buses and get permission to post the photos to the company website.

Then, he said, “Encourage that group to come to your website to see the pictures.... ‘Hey, that’s our group,’ or ‘That’s a picture that someone submitted from our group. I’m going to pin that using the Pinterest tool.’

That goes onto their board, and it’s broadcast to all the millions of people using Pinterest and allows it to get re-pinned and re-pinned. And every time it does, your company name is going to be front and center because they’ve pinned it off of your website.”



## Touching Moment

UMA Chairman Bill Allen and his wife, Gail, above left, introduced their radiant daughter, Teal Wicks, to Travel Exchange attendees at a luncheon where she and 19 other Broadway performers presented songs from their shows.

Wicks, who has been performing since middle school, sang a beautiful song, "In His Eyes," from *Jekyll and Hyde*, which has been touring the U.S., covering 26 cities, for the past six months. The show is to open on Broadway in

April. She plays Emma Carew, the fiancee of Dr. Jekyll. Wicks told Allen she was thrilled to perform in front of his friends, colleagues and peers, and mom and dad were equally thrilled to see her.



The traditional Expo "Cigars & Cordials" post-"Awards Dinner" reception was well received by NTA members.



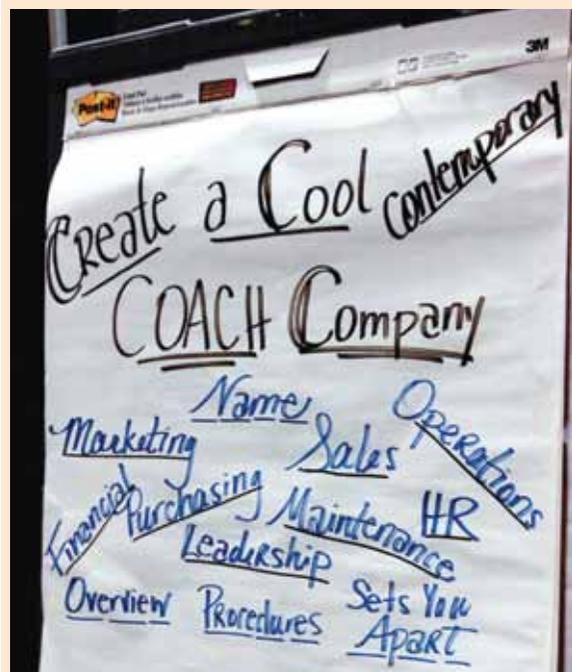
Al Daoud, left, and Dennis Shinault of Protective Insurance Co. in Indianapolis, enjoy a light moment during an Expo break.



Steve Hartman, a CBS News correspondent for the past 14 years was master of ceremonies for the major events at Travel Exchange. Hartman has appeared at the annual NTA Convention in recent years and returned for the inaugural Travel Exchange. Hartman is perhaps best known for his award-winning feature series, *Everybody Has a Story*, based on his belief in a "theory" of the same name. He has traveled the world telling stories of seemingly ordinary individuals picked by throwing a dart at a map and a random selection from a local phone book.

## Young Guns Game

Younger motorcoach industry executives again coalesced at Expo. This year, they participated in a game that called for creating a "cool, contemporary" coach company that had to cope with a variety of challenges. To say that some of the "companies" were a little off beat might be considered a motorcoach-sized understatement. The companies competed and an eventual winner, of sorts, was picked.



Laura Fowler Goss of Fabulous Coach Lines, left, celebrates at the conclusion of the Young Guns' "cool company" competition.

# Growth areas: Family, adventure, experiential, solo travel

ORLANDO, Fla. — Say “family travel” and you might conjure an image of a mom, dad and a pair of kiddies, ages of 4 and 8, at a theme park entrance.

Say “adventure tourism” and you might envision young, down-clad climbers scaling Mount Kilimanjaro.

You’d be on the right track.

But adding still more images can help you tap into family travel and adventure tourism, two of the industry’s top growth markets.

That was a theme heard at an NTA Convention at Travel Exchange forum here last month that brought together leaders from both markets.

Nancy Schretter, founder of the Family Travel Network, said family travel goes beyond the traditional nuclear family these days.

Grandparents travel with their children and their grandchildren more than ever before; adult children travel with their parents more, and single parents and their children travel more, she said.

“Major societal and demographic trends are causing families to travel together longer,” she said. “Parents and grandparents are liv-

ing longer, they’re healthier, they want to travel.

“Kids have grown up traveling with their parents and they want to keep doing that. And the millennials, those born after 1980, are very oriented toward friends and family, and they want to keep traveling with their families.

“So, it’s really important to focus on this broader definition of family travel because there are lots of growth opportunities here that are being missed.”

Debra Asberry, founder of Women Traveling Together, discussed the expanding adventure tourism market. Her company specializes in taking small groups of female travelers on 35 to 40 tours a year, about one-quarter of which could be called “adventure travel.”

“We prefer the term ‘experiential travel,’” she said.

“The reason we like that term is because, quite frankly, the word adventure scares people off, particularly women. The first time they hear that term they think, ‘Oh, you want me to climb Mount Kilimanjaro. You want me to go rock climbing. You want me to know how to roll a kayak.’ None of these

things are true.

“We do offer everything from horseback riding to kayaking and rafting to walkabouts and you name it, but they are all interwoven

**‘The family travel market, particularly the multigenerational market, is immense.’**

for the most part in a traditional sightseeing tour. Quite honestly, you can take any tour that you can imagine and weave these other things into it and attract an entirely different type of clientele.”

Keith Baron of Abercrombie and Kent, doesn’t like to offer definitions of “adventure travel.” He noted his company organizes everything from African safaris to multi-city explorations in India to “adventure cruises” to Antarctica and the Galapagos Islands, as well as climbing trips to Mount Kilimanjaro and Mount Everest Base Camp.

“What we’ve found is that every traveler has their own definition of adventure travel,” said

Baron, whose firm pioneered the “luxury adventure travel” market when it began offering photographic safaris of Africa in 1962.

“We like to think of our customers as experience seekers. ... We don’t define them, and they don’t define themselves, by demographics. It’s more about experience and trying to find depth and authenticity in the things that they do.”

Like Schretter, Baron noted a trend toward multigenerational travel.

“We’re seeing a very specific trend toward growth in multigenerational adventure travel, including climbing (Mount Kilimanjaro),” he said.

“Parents, grandparents want to have a shared multigenerational experience, and the bond grows that much more deeply and quickly because they’re adding that somewhat physically or emotionally challenging...experience, and it does bond them together.

Another adventure travel trend is the boom in solo traveling.

“This is really about like-mindedness,” Baron said. “(T)he great thing about it is that when they come together with like-minded

people, all of a sudden, there’s this very quick connection, even more so than on a standard general sightseeing program. They can build this bond very, very quickly.”

The panelists had some practical advice for people who wanted to enter or succeed in their respective markets, including:

Schretter said: “The family travel market, particularly the multigenerational market, is immense, and it’s going to continue to grow. Look at what you have in your portfolio and say ‘how can we serve this family travel market?’”

Baron said: “Social media.”

Asberry said: “You need to know who your client is. Your client is going to drive what you eventually are going to do. What are their needs and wants and build your tours around that. And experiment with your most popular existing tours and see how you can add an element of adventure or experience into an existing destination.

Bart Donnelly, of Travel Alberta, said: “You need to be authentic. You can’t pretend you know what you’re talking about. You need to be real, and if you think you can’t do it, get those experts who can.”

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# Tips for doing a better job of tapping family travelers

ORLANDO, Fla. — To put it plainly, top trends in family travel include moms on the Internet, kids choosing where to go, and grandparents going, too.

And it's wise to keep all that in mind to succeed in the booming family travel market.

Family travel expert Nancy Schretter didn't put it that way — she used terms like “internet planning,” “kids choose” and “multigenerational travel” — but the message that things are changing was clear during her “All in the Family” seminar at last month's NTA Convention at Travel Exchange.

And she had the statistics to back it up:

“Sixty-three percent of moms turn to online travel sites and blogs for information, and 65 percent of online moms use social networks for obtaining traveling tips,” said Schretter, founder of the Family Travel Network.

“Sixty-one percent of parents make sure their destination is going to please their kids, and 28 percent of the kids actually make the decision on where the family goes on their vacations and trips.

“Multigenerational travel is a huge growth market.

“Forty percent of all active leisure travelers have taken at least one multigenerational trip in the last 12 months.

“Twenty-two percent of grandparents travel with just their grandchildren alone, no parents at all, and we see this trend increasing. Sixty-seven percent of grandparents say that children are never too old to be treated to a family vacation.”

According to Schretter, other trends include all-inclusive family vacations, trips with an educational component and opportunities to volunteer and make a difference, and single-parent travel, including parents traveling singly on a one-on-one trip with a child.

Here's her pointers on using trends in family travel to create opportunities:

Market to the multigenerational market. “Clearly position multigenerational offerings on your website and social media so people understand what you're offering.

“Your decision makers are online. If possible, offer something special to grandparents who are



Nancy Schretter

paying the bill. Maybe offer them an upgrade or a special experience or some sort of memorable gift.”

Create ways to make great family vacation memories. “Find ways for families to leave behind a legacy....Disney has found this with their brick area where families can personalize a brick or a memento and put it on a wall.

“Families want to come back and say, ‘Hey, remember when we made that together, look it's still

here.’ When families leave something behind, it's very emotionally powerful for them.”

Offer photos to guests so they can re-live their trip at home. “Take tons of pictures, particularly family pictures, and provide your guests with image CDs.

“Why is this important? Because moms are the ones who take the pictures. So, if you go back through years and years of family travel, you will see your husband with the kids as they get older, but if you look for a group family picture, they often don't have them. That value is priceless. They love pictures.”

Develop a team of loyal family travel customers and travel writers to be your brand ambassadors. “The ski industry has been doing this very, very successfully.... They got a group of family traveling bloggers, moms who came to their resort, experienced it and then they get together on a periodic basis to do Twitter chats, blogs and events. It's really helped to convert lookers into buyers.”

Highlight knowledgeable guides on your website. “The moms are the ones who are up late

doing the research trying to find that perfect trip, and if they know that you have guides who really know your destination, know it inside and out, that saves them tons of time. And saved time equals value.”

Adapt your website and product descriptions to include kid-friendly features.

“Specifically, highlight opportunities where kids get to shine. Highlight kids- and teens-only activities.

“Specifically if you have pools, water sports, it's very important to kids so they want that....If you have them, include quotes from kids, teens and young adults who have been to your destination or your tour or attraction and really had a great time. Kids listen to other kids.”

Be aware of family members who have challenges and provide options. “That's something that people are looking for and it can make the difference in booking one place or another.

“If I have somebody with challenges in my family, I want to see that this place really understands that and caters to their needs.”

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# Advice: Check out federal rural grant program

ORLANDO, Fla. — Motorcoach operators interested in initiating scheduled bus service to rural areas of their states can get a helping hand and possibly a substantial amount of cash from the federal government.

Each year, the U.S. Department of Transportation doles out millions of dollars in grants to the states to help bus companies buy and operate buses used to provide regular public transportation between metropolitan and rural areas.

"It's not free money and you will have to work for it, but it's there to help you set up and run your service," motorcoach industry consultant Mark Szyperski told operators at the annual United Motorcoach Association State Association Summit held here last

month in conjunction with UMA Motorcoach Expo.

The so-called 5311(f) grants are designed to provide residents of communities with populations of less than 50,000 with scheduled transportation to nearby large metropolitan areas where they can connect with intercity buses and other scheduled carriers.

In fiscal 2012, the government distributed almost \$77 million to the states. The biggest recipients were Texas, with \$5 million, and California with \$3.3 million. The smallest amounts went to Delaware, with \$189,000, and Rhode Island, with \$86,000.

Szyperski said each state decides if it wants to participate in the federal program, and operators interested in learning the require-

ments of the grants, and if their state is participating, will need to contact their state transportation department.

Also, he noted, the rules for how the money can be spent may differ from state to state.

"You need to ask questions," he said.

Szyperski said the money generally can be used to not only help pay for the purchase of a bus and its daily operating costs, but for the planning and marketing of the service as well.

"It can serve as a safety net for the operator, he noted.

He said that in some states, the money can be used to pay for as much as 50 percent of a new bus. However, he added, the bus cannot be used for charter work, commut-

er runs or airport service.

Private carriers are eligible for the funds because one of the key goals of the federal program is to provide for the participation of private transportation carriers in non-urbanized transportation.

Among its other goals are: enhancing the access of people in rural areas to health care, shopping, education, employment, public services and recreation; encouraging and facilitating the most efficient use of all transportation funds used to provide passenger transportation in non-urbanized areas through the coordination of programs and services; assisting in the development and support of intercity bus transportation, and helping in the maintenance, development, improvement and use of



Mark Szyperski

public transportation systems in rural areas.

Szyperski's contact information is posted on his website at [www.onyourmarktransportation.com](http://www.onyourmarktransportation.com).

Additional information can be found at [www.fta.dot.gov/grants/13093\\_3555.html](http://www.fta.dot.gov/grants/13093_3555.html).

## Everything seatbelts

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

his agency hopes to finalize several key regulations by the end of this year.

Interviewed at the North American International Auto Show, Strickland also confirmed his agency expects to issue the bus seatbelt rule "very soon."

NHTSA also has pending regulations to improve bus rollover structural integrity, emergency evacuation, and fire safety.

"We're working through some interagency issues," Strickland said.

### Seatbelt rule timetable

NHTSA, which has been debating requiring seatbelts on motorcoaches since 1977, has said the requirement would take effect three years after a final version of its rule is published.

The agency won't require the nation's current fleet of 30,000-plus commercial buses to be retrofitted with seatbelts, saying it might not be "economically feasible" for many small carriers. But NHTSA isn't ruling out taking the action at a later date.

That last caveat — that the retrofitting issue could be revisited in the future — worries many operators.

"You might expect that from them," moaned one operator.

The cost to include the seatbelts on new buses is expected to add about \$13,000 to each coach, substantially less than the estimated \$30,000 to \$40,000 it would cost to put belts — that actually meet proposed federal standards — on existing buses.

Most manufactures have of-

fered seatbelts on their new coaches for at least two years and operators have been buying them.

### The waiting game

Both large and small operators across the country have anxiously and fearfully awaited the NHTSA decision as the agency studied safety value of passenger safety belts and performed a series of crash and other tests to determine what happens to belted and unbelted passengers during various types of accidents.

During the lengthy waiting period, operators repeatedly warned the federal agency that retrofitting would be so expensive that it could force many small and possibly even some large operators out of business.

Brian Cooke of Hampton Jitney said the decision not to include older buses in the seatbelt mandate was the right decision because it would have financially crushed many operators.

"It would have been devastating for many of them," he said.

Robert Spann of Five Star Charter in Naperville, Ill., called the decision "great news" and said his company would have been among those that probably could not have afforded the retrofitting costs.

"Most of us small operators do not have new buses and probably would have had trouble financing retrofitting or buying new buses with seatbelts."

### Zero sum game

John Burnett of Premier Coaches Northwest in Federal Way, Wash. said he, too, was glad to hear that retrofitting will not be mandated because there are too many buses

on the road today that were not built or designed to support seatbelts.

"And the expense to retrofit is not a cost that you could recover when you go to sell your buses," he added.

Gentry agreed, pointing out that while having seatbelts on older buses might make them more saleable, they would not increase the value of the coaches enough to get back what was spent to retrofit them.

While the ruling solves the money challenge that owners would have faced had they been required to install seatbelts on their existing buses, those who have only older buses in their fleets worry that the decision could create yet another major dilemma.

As the public gets word that new buses have to have seatbelts, the operators fear that many of their customers will begin asking — perhaps even demanding — that only buses with seatbelts be used on their trips.

Such requests, they suggest, could cause them to lose business to competing carriers that have buses with safety belts.

### The seatbelt dilemma

Cooke said the concern is real and that's why his company decided to add seatbelts to four buses that were recently completely refurbished.

"We were having them done anyway, so that was a good time to include seatbelts on them," he said.

Others are less worried because they have some buses in their fleets with seatbelts, and they get only a handful of requests from customers asking for buses equipped with belts.

Warren Micale of Master's Touch in Prescott Valley, Ariz. said schools and the elderly often ask for buses with safety belts for their trips and he usually can accommodate them because his fleet includes two newer buses equipped with them.

Still, he said, had a mandate for seatbelts been placed on existing buses, he would have been in trouble because he could not afford to equip his other buses.

Dale Stern of Buckeye Charters in Dayton, Ohio, said he also gets calls from time to time from people requesting seat-belted buses and so far he has been able to handle the requests because his fleet includes four buses equipped with them.

However, he, too, said he could not afford to install them on his other buses.

### The 'buckle-up' issue

If the NHTSA decision were to require retrofitting, it would have presented operators with another challenge — getting passengers to use them.

"We have some buses with belts and no one seems to use them," said Woody Shelnett of Coastal Georgia Trailways in Brunswick, Ga.

Mark C. Richardson of Plymouth & Brockton Street Railway Co. in Plymouth, Mass., said he sees the same situation at his company.

"My observation is that very few people ever use them."

States could opt to require their use, as they do with automobiles.

NHTSA has said previously that requiring belts on new buses will cost the industry \$25 million annually, and will save an estimat-

ed 1 to 8 lives annually, depending on the rate of seatbelt usage.

A number of notable accidents, including the deaths of seven people in 2007 on a bus carrying the Bluffton (Ohio) University baseball team, directly led to proposals in Congress to mandate safety belts on buses to keep people in their seats during rollovers and other serious accidents.

Wearing lap-shoulder belts on motorcoaches could reduce the risk for passengers of being killed in a rollover crash by 77 percent, NHTSA says.

Seatbelts on motorcoaches have long been urged by the National Transportation Safety Board, and Congress has debated requiring them. Last year, Congress told NHTSA to require safety belts on buses as part of the federal highway and public transportation reauthorization bill.

### Meanwhile at NHTSA

Strickland said NHTSA is working to finalize a rule proposed last May to require anti-rollover technology (electronic stability control) in motorcoaches and on truck tractors. Many new coaches already have the technology.

NHTSA noted that rollovers and crashes among heavy vehicles account for 304 fatalities and 2,738 injuries annually.

"They are also a major cause of traffic tie-ups, resulting in millions of dollars of lost productivity and excess energy consumption each year.

Suppliers and truck and motorcoach manufacturers have developed stability control technology for heavy vehicles to mitigate these types of crashes," NHTSA says.

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## NTA folk to UMA folk: Come on over

ORLANDO, Fla. — As the name implies, the first Travel Exchange, which brought the UMA Motorcoach Expo and the annual NTA Convention together at the Orange County Convention Center here last month, was designed in part to foster an exchange among the 3,600 attendees affiliated with both groups.

But for some who attended, the event was a little like a middle school dance with the boys on one side, the girls on the other, and everyone reluctant to make the first move.

"I've haven't seen a single one," said Courtney Hunter, of the Lynchburg (Va.) Regional Convention and Visitors Bureau, of UMA members asking for information about her region.

"I guess it's probably a new format and they're still learning. It's just that learning curve."

And Hunter wasn't alone. Several NTA suppliers and destination marketing organizations said they

had had little interaction with UMA tour-or-charter operators.

"On the plane, I met a gentleman from our area who was coming to UMA, and we met a guy at a restaurant, but as far as networking here in the showcase center, no, I haven't networked with them or rubbed shoulders or anything," said Troy Beam, of the Jim Beam Distillery in Shepherdsville, Ky.

Beam said he hadn't booked a single appointment with a coach operator, nor had he approached any people wearing black UMA badges, either.

At the Team Texas booth, Mark T. Thompson of the Plano Convention and Visitors Bureau, had better luck meeting UMA folks.

"Yesterday, we saw quite a few come through. It was positive in that respect," Thompson said, as he handed out soft drinks to passersby. "I think there is a little bit of getting used to each other."

Bill Heater, of Ride the Duck, also may have formed a relation-

ship with a UMA coach operator he was seated with at a Travel Exchange event.

Heater's company operates land and water sightseeing tours in San Francisco; Branson, Mo.; Philadelphia and other locations.

"I was talking about Ride the Duck, and he said, 'Yeah, our buses go to Branson all the time. I got a card from him and I passed it along to my Branson person,'" he said.

Heater thinks there's a way to make breaking the ice easier.

"It would have been nice to create some kind of event where, 'here's UMA,' 'here's NTA,' meet this person because you're all in San Francisco. That would have been cool, sort of initiate the introduction," he said.

Thompson, from Plano, saw room for improvement, too.

"I would rather see the show blended a little better instead of separate shows. It's basically separate shows side-by-side," he said.

buffets or plated offerings because of the slew of people.

In other respects, the event reflected today's motorcoach industry and, fundamentally, the reason why the show's organizers think it's essential to have a combined show.

A number of exhibitors did not bring as many people to Expo as they have in previous years, mirroring the industry's deflated business and buying climate.

There's a reason why new motorcoach sales are languishing at depressed levels (see story on Page 3), and unless and until the tour-and-charter segment of the industry begins experiencing noticeable growth, many industry suppliers will continue to mark time.

"We just scratched the surface of what this joint show can be," said Hundt.

The leadership of NTA apparently thinks so too.

"NTA and UMA have very similar histories in terms of how we were formed and why we were formed as organizations," noted Lisa Simon, NTA president.

"And we have very similar cultures. We share the same values in terms of how we do business and how we do partnerships."

She said the combined shows offer many opportunities for attendees to form new partnerships.

"There are many UMA members who are doing tour-and-charter work, but they don't really want to be the tour operator, they want to meet tour operators, and so that's new business for our tour op-

## UMA gets director, secretary; Capitol Hill Day is pressed

ORLANDO, Fla. — Members of the United Motorcoach Association have elected a new board member and re-elected five directors; the UMA board has picked a new secretary.

The new board member is David Moody, general manager of Holiday Tours in Randleman, N.C.

Moody began working at Holiday, which is 50 percent owned by his parents, Rhonda and Gary Moody, in 1997, at the age of 14. He joined the company fulltime in 2006, after getting his undergraduate degree from the University of North Carolina-Greensboro.

His principal role in recent years has been coordinating and upgrading the company information technology system. Last September he received his MBA from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and was subsequently promoted to general manager.

At age 29, he is the youngest member of the UMA board.

Moody replaces his boss, David Brown, on the UMA board, and now helps represent UMA Region II ("the Midwest," which includes the southeastern U.S.).

Long-time board member and former UMA chairman, David Brown, CEO of Holiday Tours, did not seek re-election. Brown served 12 years (four terms) on the UMA board and two years as chairman, 2004-06.

He said it was "extremely" difficult to leave the UMA board. "For the most part, it was a very enjoyable experience and I hope I did actually add to the process," he said.

Brown was honored at UMA Motorcoach Expo here last month for his service.

For those keeping score, there are now only two individuals with the surname of Brown on the UMA board — James and Steve.

Re-elected to three-year terms on the board from Region I (the West) were UMA Chairman Bill Allen of Amador Stage Lines in Sacramento, Calif., and UMA Treasurer Gladys Gillis of Starline Luxury Coaches in Seattle.

Re-elected to the board from Region II was Brian Scott of Escot

Bus Lines in Largo, Fla.

Re-elected from Region III (the Northeast) were Dale Krapf of Krapf Coaches in West Chester, Pa., and Marcia Milton of First Priority Trailways in District Heights, Md.

Elected UMA board secretary for a one-year term was Joan Libby of Cavalier Coach Trailways in Boston. Gillis was re-elected to another one-year term as treasurer.

Under UMA bylaws, the secretary and treasurer are officers of the association along with the chairman (Allen) and vice chairman, Brian Annett of Annett Bus Lines in Sebring, Fla.

During the UMA Active Member Meeting conducted during Motorcoach Expo, Allen urged more involvement by operators in association management and oversight. He bemoaned the fact there were no contested seats in the latest UMA board elections.

Allen also made a strong pitch for operators to come to Washington in late June to participate in the association Capitol Hill Day.

Many operators — who've previously participated in the event — have described it as an extraordinarily rewarding experience and perhaps the only time they felt their voice was heard in Washington.

This year's Capitol Hill Day, which involves briefings by legislators and calling on House and Senate members or key members of their staffs, will be June 26.

Those interested in coming should plan on flying or driving in the day before the Hill visit.

"I'm begging you guys to come to Washington," Allen said to operators attending the association Legislative & Regulatory Update at Expo. "When we're together, we're strong."

For more information or to sign up, contact Ken Presley at UMA at [kpresley@uma.org](mailto:kpresley@uma.org), or call (800) 424-8262.

Finally, she said, "the UMA companies who are doing the tour-and-charter business themselves are going to buy directly from our suppliers and destinations. So that's new business for that segment of the industry as well."



David Moody

## Growing bus travel

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

bined event, which is called Travel Exchange.

"As time goes on, our operators and members will find ways of connecting," leading to new business opportunities, said Hundt.

UMA President and CEO Victor Parra said the co-location is an ideal arena to network because it brings together a broad spectrum of travel professionals, from coach operators to tour operators, bus manufacturers, finance and insurance companies, restaurateurs and representatives of attractions.

"We all have the same customer," he said. "So the entire business process has come together. More than that, (there are) the relationships that can form."

But, while the associations' leaders focused on the overarching goals of the combined event, at ground level those attending the show from the motorcoach industry — who truly engaged the expanded format — found a Motorcoach Expo unlike any they had ever experienced.

Superlatives tended to flow from these individuals.

"Tremendous event."

"The Broadway lunch was phenomenal."

"The Welcome Reception/Icebreaker at Kennedy Space Center was exceptional."

UMA members also could attend a much broader array of education sessions.

And those coach operators who

brought employees from their tour departments found representatives from an extraordinary range of destinations, attractions, hotels, restaurants and other venues on the NTA half of the show floor.

However, for those whose sum-total involvement with the industry is generally limited to manning an Expo booth once a year or walking the Expo aisles and kicking the tires of new buses, the perception easily could have been that the show had changed little.

After all, the event had everything Expos are supposed to have — suppliers and vendors by the score, engaging education sessions aplenty, decent food, and pleasant Florida weather.

But even for these individuals, having a combined show apparently produced at least one important benefit. There were 23 percent more motorcoach operators on the show floor than there were at UMA Motorcoach Expo in Long Beach, Calif., last February.

And for those who feared the Motorcoach Expo half of the side-by-side show floor would be clogged by gawking NTA members, that didn't happen. It seems they just aren't into tires, batteries and accessories.

Even though there were 3,600 people at the UMA Expo and NTA Convention, which is more than double the number that typically attends a Motorcoach Expo, most the time the venues and activities never felt crowded.

Those who were late for lunch, however, sometimes missed the

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# A Candies Coachworks acquires Fabulous Coach Lines

BRANFORD, Fla. — The motorcoach industry's highest-profile "young gun," Ray Land, has sold most of his bus operation so he can pursue other business and personal interests.

A Candies Coachworks purchased the charter business and five Prevost coaches from Fabulous Coach Lines, which was founded by Land in 2004, when he was 17.

Two years ago, Land and a half-dozen other — mostly under age 35 — operators formed a loose affiliation under the aegis of the United Motorcoach Association called the "Young Guns."

Land and four of the Young Guns participated in a featured panel session at UMA Motorcoach Expo 2011 in Tampa, Fla., and later during the show were joined on the Expo floor by 20 or so other young industry executives for a discussion of how they could interact in the future.

At last year's Expo in Long Beach, Calif., the Young Guns conducted brainstorming sessions on a variety of issues. This year, the group engaged in a riotous game that involved four teams cre-

ating new motorcoach companies that were pitted in a competition involving how they would handle various challenges.

Candies founder and CEO, Sander Kaplan, 48, said he initiated the purchase after hearing that Land was looking "to do something else."

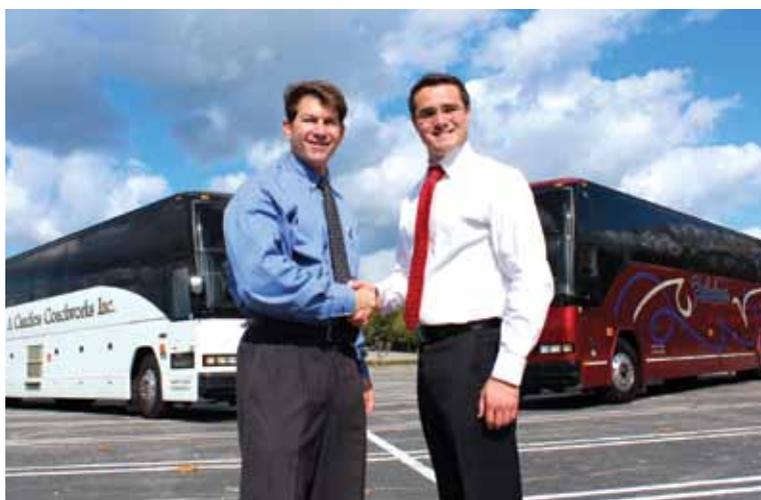
"I called Ray and said, 'We could do a win-win. Are you interested in selling your company?' He said, 'yes,' and we struck a deal the next day. He was thinking about this for some time... He was ready to go."

Land told Kaplan and others he had tired of the demands of operating a coach company.

Kaplan and Land became acquainted when Land was a high school senior and hired a Hummer limousine from Kaplan for his high school prom.

When Kaplan, who had been operating limousines since 1986, diversified in 2006 by purchasing his first motorcoach, he and Land became "friendly competitors." The two would talk and share referrals.

Kaplan and his A Candies operation is based in Gainesville, Fla.,



Sander Kaplan, left, Ray Land celebrate deal.

while Land and his bus company is in Branford, roughly 50 miles away.

As their businesses grew, they became "real competitors," said Kaplan.

Owing to his outsized personality, gift for gab and business smarts, Land's company grew rapidly, operating upwards of 60 buses at one point, before hitting a wall.

At the time of the sale, Fabulous Coach Lines was operating 28 vehicles, 18 of which were motorcoaches. A Candies also purchased a stretch limousine and town car

from the Fabulous Coach fleet.

Land did not sell a casino shuttle he operates, called Players Coach, that offers line service along Interstate 75 to the Hard Rock Casino in Tampa, and provides occasional vacation runs to casinos in Biloxi, Miss., and the Harrah's casino in Cherokee, N.C. He is keeping five coaches for that service.

But it is other interests that seem to be driving Land these days.

He said he plans to do consulting for the transportation hospital-

ity industry, get a pilot's license, and write a book.

He also plans to continue his keynote speaking business, and seek to grow a start-up transportation applications business, Totuit, he co-founded about two years ago.

In recent years, Land has picked up a number of honors, including being named to the *Inc.* magazine 30 under 30 list of entrepreneurs, the *Bloomberg Businessweek* 25 Top Entrepreneurs under 25, and *BUSRide* magazine Industry Achievement Award.

A Candies is a *LCT* magazine Operator of the Year Award winner.

With the addition of the former Fabulous coaches, A Candies coach unit now operates a fleet of 13 Prevosts, plus two midsize buses. A Candies Limousine has seven vehicles.

"We are really looking forward to expanding our brand" by acquiring the book of business, buses and charter operation of Fabulous Coach, said Kaplan.

In addition to acquiring the assets, A Candies also is hiring 10-15 of Fabulous Coach's 60-plus full- and part-time employees.

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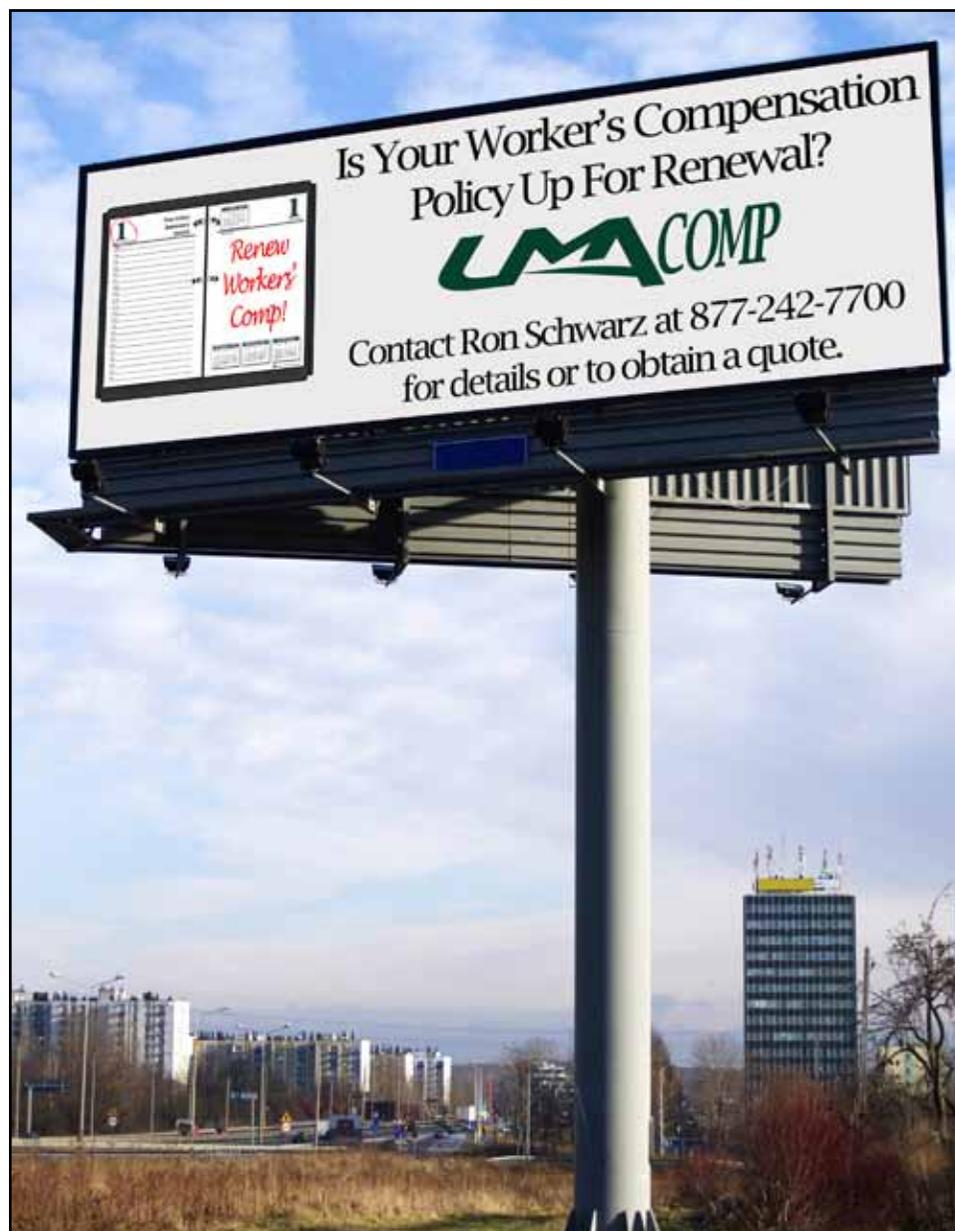
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