



# National Bus Trader

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# MCI Academy Wins Fans Across Industry

*If you need to replace retiring expertise or boost skills on your team,  
MCI is building the industry's best solution*

by Pat Plodzeen

Photos courtesy of MCI

**S**cott Parsons is the second-generation owner of Parsons & Sons Transportation in Conception Bay South, Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada. Each day, he oversees office and operations staff that keep a fleet of 16 motorcoaches, 22 school buses and five minibuses busy. Parsons has spent his life in the business, founded as a school bus operator by his father in 1962.

For dedicated operators like Parsons, it is a familiar scenario – maintenance skills are learned mostly on the job, adapting to every new model, every evolution in component design. Some mechanics arrive with heavy truck repair experience – but a heavy truck is not a motorcoach. Learning happens on the job.

However, as operators know, such hands-on knowledge is tough to pass along while running a growing business. Parsons, now 62, has been the company's lead technical expert for the past 47 years. As he is now ready to "to pass the torch," there is finally an efficient, effective way to ensure that important technical skills never leave his business: MCI Academy.

## Training the next generation

Parsons has enrolled Robert Dinham, a technician who has been employed by the firm for two years. Dinham completed two week-long sessions at MCI Academy's training facility in Louisville, Kentucky. Dinham has completed additional coursework via MCI Academy's online Learning Management System (LMS) which allows him the flexibility to study any time of the day or night.

"My situation makes (MCI Academy) priceless," Parsons says, remembering the "old way" of reading MCI's MC-8 and MC-9 service manuals cover to cover. "This is much better," he adds.

Dinham is not Parsons' lead technician, but MCI Academy is there to prepare professionals of all skill levels for that eventual job. Says Parsons, "He has a keen interest in the industry and has been teaching other team members in our shop what he has learned. He tells us that the training is far superior to any he's received."



The MCI Academy has been increasingly successful in training a new generation of coach technicians. In addition to hands-on training here at the MCI facility in Louisville, Kentucky, MCI also offers their online Learning Management System. MCI recently received an award from the Automotive Training Management Council for one of their training programs.

Parsons points to other measurements of success: "We are already seeing positive results with quicker diagnostics, a less-stressed and happier worker and associated savings. We are happy to be part of the (MCI) program," said Parsons, who plans to send other members of his team to the Academy in the future.

## First on the web and in the classroom

MCI was an early adopter of online technical instruction, launching a twice-monthly webinar series in 2008. Around the same time, MCI began to offer Technical Tune-Up sessions taught by company technical experts at the Louisville-based location of MCI's parts distribution facility, and its technical and roadside assistance call centers.

In 2015, MCI launched Learning Management System to give technicians a convenient, comprehensive and customizable training resource available online 24/7. LMS is comprised of modules, most 15 minutes

in length, that cover virtually all systems and components found on MCI coaches. Each module includes a quiz at the end that issues a certificate once the student passes the training. Most modules are intended for technicians, but several are designed to benefit drivers and other personnel. LMS courses are free of charge to MCI operators.

## ASE accreditation – only MCI

MCI Academy combines its classroom instruction, testing and LMS courses for a multifaceted training experience. The Academy allows technicians to achieve system qualifications, Technician Levels 1, 2 and 3 Certification and specialty diplomas in HVAC and electrical systems.

This unusual and deep mix of educational programming earned MCI Academy the motorcoach industry's first accreditation from the National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence (ASE), responsible for the rigorous Continuing Automotive Service





Scott Crawford, center, accepts the award from the Automotive Training Managers Council that named MCI's HVAC 101 curriculum the Grand Award Winner in their 2017 ATMC National Excellence in Training program.



Fullington Trailways in Clearfield, Pennsylvania has benefitted from MCI's HVAC training at the Academy. This training was a big help to some of their new, younger technicians and has reduced the number of HVAC issues.

Education (CASE) standards. In earning the ASE accreditation, MCI stands with an elite group including 3M Automotive Aftermarket Division, BMW of North America, General Motors Service Technical College, Toyota and Penske Truck Leasing.

This past fall, the MCI Academy also scored a top technician training award on its first try. The Automotive Training Managers Council (ATMC) named MCI Academy's HVAC 101 curriculum the Grand Award winner in its 2017 ATMC National Excellence in Training program, recognizing MCI's interior heating and cooling systems training as one of the most innovative in the motorcoach industry.

MCI's HVAC 101 is part of a four-week Specialist Diploma program to provide technicians with all the knowledge and skills on a system that is key to passengers' comfort. MCI's live HVAC coursework begins with the basics and progresses to advanced diagnostics "while incorporating all the best practices for development and delivery of training," according to ATMC.

#### **Fullington Trailways: Knowing the connection between well-trained technicians and fleet productivity**

Jonathan Berzas, president of The Fullington Trailways, Clearfield, Pennsylvania, knows exactly how his operations have benefitted from HVAC training at the Academy.

"We've lost a couple of our senior guys to retirement and find ourselves with technicians at all different skill levels, including newer, younger technicians," said Berzas who has a 15-member technical team at four central Pennsylvania locations servicing 77 motorcoaches and five limousines, seven vans and 221 school buses. With a busy schedule serving tour operators, student and group charter planning for travel throughout the U.S. and Canada, HVAC breakdowns

can be costly in terms of time, money and passenger loyalty.

Team inexperience with HVAC systems leads to too much time paging through manuals or seeking phone assistance, and dedicated MCI Academy training has produced a "tremendous reduction in HVAC issues here," says Berzas. Training also provides a bonding experience for technicians, he says. "Two of the five technicians work at our other locations, and now they go back and forth with sidebar conversations relying on each other on how to fix and repair systems," said Berzas. His ultimate goal is to see that all of his technicians acquire HVAC and electrical system

training over the next three years through the MCI Academy.

"What MCI is doing is invaluable. Even if a new hire is a diesel mechanic, that person likely trained on trucks, not motorcoaches," explains Berzas. "It's really important to know how systems work on motorcoaches because they are more complex. I still want them to go through the full on-site classes. You learn more when you're there. And you have to have good teachers. Our plan is to tie new-hire, 90-day probation and annual pay increases to passing courses."

Fullington is one of the oldest transportation companies in the United States,

MCI training is also available online. Online training was initially offered in 2008 and that grew into MCI's Learning Management System that is available 24/7. It is comprised of training modules that cover a wide range of topics for technicians, drivers as well as others and are available free of charge to MCI operators.



marking its 110th anniversary this year. It joined Trailways in 1981 and is owned and operated by fourth generation members of the Fullington family.

#### Coursework evolves, attendance grows

"As the design and systems on motor-coaches continues to advance, our goal is to offer the industry's best training option," said Scott Crawford, MCI technical training manager. Crawford has a 15-year career with MCI, where he has been leading MCI's technical training division

for the past 10 years, with prior positions in technical and parts support representation. He is responsible for establishing the MCI Academy. Prior to joining MCI, Crawford was director of maintenance for Antelope Valley Bus, and western regional maintenance manager for Coach USA. He also served in the United State Navy for eight years as a construction mechanic and instructor.

"Our operators have told us that attracting top technicians is a top business

Shown here is one of the groups recently completing training at the MCI Academy. Back row left to right: Anton Atanassov, MCI; Andrew Garcia, USD 457 Transportation; Curtis Brooks, Anchor Transportation; Bill Pfeifer, MCI; Evan McIntire, Quick Livick; Trevor Branco, The Free Enterprise System. Front row left to right: David Moncada, MCI and Kenny Ware, MCI.



Here are more technicians recently completing training at the MCI Academy. Left to right: Tom Renae, MCI; Dennis Walker, MCI; Kyle Strole, Miller Transportation; Julian Castaneda, Dallas Service Center; John Tressler, Buckeye Charter and Mike Richardson, Free Enterprise.



need and MCI's expanding, multi-subject curriculum has proven to be successful in elevating the skill levels of technicians in a very short amount of time," he said. Whether public or private operators are large or small, the flexibility of MCI's online and on-site coursework makes all the difference.

Today, MCI's Learning Management System has 11,000 registered users including technicians, drivers and staff with a growing library of more than 450 courses including the HVAC curriculum and training in electrical systems and clean-diesel engine regeneration procedures. Enrollment is growing. To date, more than 1,600 professionals have been trained in MCI's onsite Tech Tune-Up program with more than 55,000 LMS courses completed online.

#### Training that helps identify, train and retain next-generation talent

"Our entire course catalog is structured in such a way that you can create a career path for a technician by levels of advancement," says Crawford. MCI customizes an educational track for each account with a sophisticated measurement and reporting component. Operators and their maintenance directors can create their own education plan by requiring technicians to take courses specific to company needs and goals.

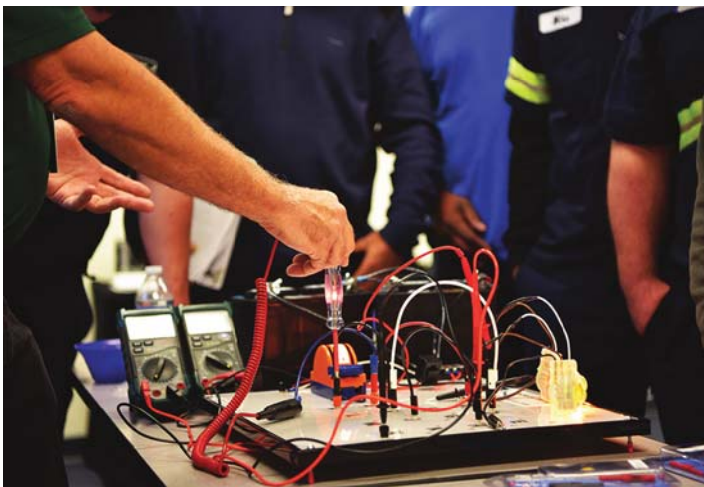
The system keeps track of technicians' courses, the number of courses taken and test scores. Managers can also see how many times a technician has taken a particular test to pass. Good technicians are hard to find, but MCI Academy helps operators develop their own technician teams.

Gene Wordekemper, director of maintenance at Arrow Stage Lines, was one of the first to test out the MCI's LMS system. For Arrow's technicians, MCI LMS has represented a convenient way to meet their employer's requirement of 40 hours of continuing education a year. It is an ongoing way to test technician proficiency, make improvements and assess technicians' commitment to their careers.

"I was looking for a system to incentivize my guys, to let them know the steps they need to climb," says Wordekemper. "There's nothing better than sending technicians to Louisville for a week of hands-on MCI training, but picking the ones who should go is difficult. With LMS, I can see which technicians have that can-do attitude, and those are the ones you send to training because they're engaged. The bang for the buck is going to be instant."

Wordekemper also values the system for its ability to show technicians the steps they need to complete to earn merit pay increases. It also helps his in-house trainer by identifying any of his staff's weak spots. Says





Hands-on training for the MCI Academy is provided at the MCI facility in Louisville, Kentucky. However, the online Learning Management System can be accessed by computer.



Scott Parsons of Parsons & Sons Transportation in Newfoundland has been using the MCI Academy to "pass the torch" and effectively train new technicians from his company.

Wordekemper, "MCI is leading the pack with this. No one else is doing what they're doing – not even close."

#### **MCI goes to school, too**

MCI taps the Academy to train its own technicians employed by MCI Sales and Service Centers in the U.S. and Canada. Marcin Wojcik, who joined MCI Sales and Service Center in Des Plaines, Illinois, last year after leaving the military, said he was drawn to MCI for the opportunity to work on diesel systems. He completed his Level 3 certification through the Academy and plans on completing HVAC and electrical systems course work as well.

When MCI opened its new San Francisco Bay Area Sales and Service Center in Hayward, California, this past fall, the facility's technicians – all locally based diesel mechanic trainees – completed nearly a month of MCI Academy training. Crawford sees a day when the Academy becomes the premier destination for new and seasoned professionals to become "master" technicians.

#### **Spreading the word**

MCI is developing a comprehensive campaign to promote the benefits of the Academy throughout the motorcoach industry. During UMA Expo 2018, Crawford led an educational session on MCI Academy and how operators could use the resource to create a career path for mechanics and staff with

technical training, systems and specialty coursework. He also emphasized the Academy's value as a way to measure performance as part of technician recruitment and retention.

MCI Academy's multi-brand approach means its mission will serve the entire motorcoach industry. Enabling technicians to quickly diagnose and repair problems keep businesses in business no matter what their size. MCI is not only training today's technicians; it is securing jobs for a brighter future.

To learn more, or to register for MCI Academy programs visit [www.mciacademy.com](http://www.mciacademy.com). □



Other recent attendees at the MCI Academy included technicians from Fullington Trailways. Left to right: Evan McIntire, Quick Livick; Jim Holt, Corinth Charters; Chuck Cassick, Fullington Trailways; Jay Keller, Jefferson Bus Lines and Jason Blesel, Fullington Trailways.

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