

Arrow Stage Lines Celebrates 85 Years

Premiere transportation company evolves from a Buick sedan to state-of-the-art coaches

by Ann M. Kammerer



Originally founded in Norfolk, Nebraska, 85 years ago in 1928, Arrow Stage Lines has grown to be one of the most respected bus operations and now operates from several different locations. This MCI J4500 was photographed in Haymarket Park in Lincoln, Nebraska in 2007. Arrow Stage Lines recently expanded by adding new 2013 MCI J4500 coaches to its fleet. MCI.

A row Stage Lines has always been right on target.

Now in its 85th year, this premiere transportation company successfully moves thousands of people every day of the year. When all calculations are said and done, the mix of motorcoaches in Arrow's 200-plus fleet traverses more than 10.5 million miles a year on America's roadways.

Those numbers alone put Arrow on the map as one of the largest privately held charter companies in the United States. With 575 employees, four locations in Nebraska and seven other equipment points in seven states, Arrow's distinctively emblazoned coaches roll out of facilities in Nebraska, Missouri, Kansas, Arizona, Colorado, Iowa and Nevada.

"My great grandfather would always say that 'he who serves best usually wins,'" says

Luke Busskohl, a fourth-generation family member and regional director in this family-owned business headquartered in Omaha, Nebraska. "That says it all." Steve Busskohl commented "We're in the service business and we're here to serve people by helping them be successful in their ground transportation needs."

The past

Carl Busskohl did not set out to start a bus company but circumstances presented an opportunity. In 1928, Busskohl was awarded a mail contract between Norfolk, Nebraska, and Sioux City, Iowa. Making his run in a seven-passenger Buick sedan, Busskohl caught the eye of residents on both sides of his route who asked if they could hitch a ride. Busskohl obliged and charged his customers 75 cents for a one-way trip.

"He was definitely an entrepreneur," says Luke, Arrow's regional director/national

charter sales director out of the Omaha headquarters. "He saw an opportunity to make money and support his family. In spite of the depression, he built his first bus all on his own. That was the birth of it, and it has become a big part of our family for four generations down the road."

Busskohl continued to grow his business from its humble beginnings. Soon after his mail contract, he was awarded the newspaper delivery route for the Sioux City Journal between Sioux City and Norfolk, as well as a contract for Old Home Bread. To make those deliveries possible, Busskohl invested in a new 25-passenger Superior Bus and took out the 10 back seats to accommodate bread, newspapers and mail. He then reserved and filled the remaining 15 seats with passengers.

Busskohl's business model remained steady until the demand for passenger service accelerated during World War II.



Arrow Stage Lines traces its history back to 1928 when founder Carl Busskohl was awarded a mail contract between Norfolk, Nebraska and Sioux City, Iowa. This photo shows Carl Busskohl (left) with Doyle Busskohl. ARROW STAGE LINES.



Arrow Stage Lines started service with a seven-passenger Buick sedan. This bus was soon used on the Norfolk to Sioux City route after Carl Busskohl began accommodating passengers along with the mail. ARROW STAGE LINES.

Looking to grow, Busskohl responded by purchasing Flxible 25- and 29-passenger coaches with Chevrolet and Buick engines. "My great grandfather was a great business man," says Luke. "He came in and set the solid foundation for what a good company looks like. He was there day-in and day-out working to establish us for the long-term."

Carl Busskohl passed away at the age of 90 in 1989 and left his company in the capable hands of subsequent generations. Fourth generation family member and employee Luke Busskohl agrees that the company culture is indelibly stamped with the integrity of his great-grandfather.

"Integrity is a big word for us," Luke says. "My dad (current CEO Steve Busskohl) has always said that integrity is best illustrated by what we say or do when no one is looking. The other core values found in our company Philosophy Statement help guide us in our day to day work."

"As a family business, all of the owners and senior management team have an open

door policy. Any of our employees can come at any time and talk about issues that concern them."

The present

Arrow Stage Lines today maintains its family roots in Nebraska. Omaha claims the company's operational headquarters as well as a major hub. Corporate headquarters reside in the Busskohl hometown of Norfolk, Nebraska. Two major hubs in Grand Island and Lincoln complete the company's coverage of the Cornhusker state.

Other major hubs for Arrow include Des Moines, Iowa, Phoenix, Arizona, Denver, Colorado, Las Vegas, Nevada, Kansas City, Missouri, Topeka, Kansas, and Manhattan, Kansas. "We have multiple hubs around the country which means that communications is key to all our staff," says Luke of the drivers, administrators, operations specialists, mechanics and other members of the Arrow team. "Open communication is very important to us."

Arrow Stage Lines specializes in motorcoach charter services, contracted tours and scheduled route services through its

sister company Black Hills Stage Lines. About 60 to 65 percent of the company's business is centered on private charter service for high school, collegiate and professional athletic teams, school and church groups, entertainment groups, and the military and government organizations. The company also serves hotels and other hospitality operations by providing contracted luxury motorcoach services for groups and conventions.

"Our day-in and day-out charter service has been a very stable base over the years," says Bruce Neuharth, president and chief operating officer of Busco, Inc., which comprises Arrow Stage Lines and sister companies Corporate Transportation 'N Tours and Black Hills Stage Lines. Allied Tour and Travel is also a sister company to Arrow.

Two consistently strong markets continue to drive business on the contracted touring side. Senior citizens are perpetually interested in local tours and extended over-the-road vacations, while international travelers from Europe, Asia and Australia enjoy the comfort, safety and accessibility of coach

Over the years, Arrow Stage Lines has provided service for both big and small groups. This particular trip involved 11 or 12 coaches, mainly GM PD4106 coaches. ARROW STAGE LINES.



This photo shows the modern bus station in Arrow Stage Line's hometown of Norfolk, Nebraska when what looks like two GM PD 4107 coaches were on the route. ARROW STAGE LINES.





PHILOSOPHY STATEMENT ARROW STAGE LINES

Since 1928

"Dedicated to passenger safety and comfort in every mile we drive!"

Mission:

The Mission of Arrow Stage Lines is to provide safe, comfortable and reliable motorcoach transportation that exceeds the expectations of our customers.

Vision:

To be viewed by our customers and peers as the standard of safety, quality and customer care in the North American motorcoach market.

Core Values:

A profound respect for each and every individual.

A commitment to integrity in everything we do.

A commitment to safety in every aspect of our work.

A commitment to the "servant/leader" approach to relationships with employees and customers.

A commitment to personal excellence and continuous improvement....being the best we can be.

A commitment to teamwork as the way we work with each other.

A commitment to "exceeding the expectations" of every customer and stakeholder.

A commitment to treating each other as we wish the customer to be treated.

A commitment to financial vitality in good times and bad.

A commitment to create a friendly and fun atmosphere where participation and creativity are valued and each member of our corporate family can achieve his or her full potential.

Critical Success Factors

Anticipate and constantly improve employee satisfaction.

Anticipate and constantly improve customer satisfaction.

Establish an impeccable safety record.

Increase sales and profits.

God's favor and grace.

The diverse fleet of Arrow Stage Lines was recently expanded by the addition of these two Temsa TS 30 coaches. With a length of only 30 feet, they are very suited to smaller groups. The TS 30 offers the same big coach features and amenities that Arrow provides with its bigger coaches. CH BUS SALES/TEMSEA.

transportation. Neuharth confirms that the high-end touring niche continues to grow, with demand rising for tours on luxury coaches with premium features.

"Tours are a big part of our business from April to October," relates Neuharth. "We do tours from the East Coast to the West Coast. We do lots of cross-country tours as well as vacation, luxury and plea-

sure tours to national landmarks like the Grand Canyon."

Arrow's initiatives with the luxury and specialty markets are prime examples of the company's ongoing focus to meet customer demand and changing needs. Another example is the company's aggressive focus on keeping the fleet fresh, efficient and competitive.

Arrow Stage Lines added two new Prevost H3-45 coaches to its fleet in 2012. *From left to right:* Chuck Gunnels, regional director of Arrow Stage Lines; Steve Busskohl, CEO of Arrow Stage Lines; Luke Busskohl, regional director/national charter sales director of Arrow Stage Lines; Doyle Busskohl, chairman of the board of Arrow Stage Lines; Gaetan Bolduc, CEO of Prevost; Dann Wiltgen, vice president of key accounts; Prevost; and Keith Hayward, regional sales manager of Prevost.



In December 2012, Arrow added two 30-foot Temsa coaches at their Denver location. These mid-size coaches retain big-coach features and amenities and strengthen Arrow's ability to serve smaller sized groups. The Temsa TS 30 is manufactured in Turkey and was introduced to the U.S. market in 2012 by CH Bus Sales. The coach features fully stainless steel integral construction with a Cummins engine and Allison transmission. Passengers benefit from three-point seat belts, ample luggage space, independent suspension, a spacious restroom and a more intimate feel than a larger bus.

"These new Temsa coaches afford us the opportunity to serve smaller groups of 20 through lesser cost vehicles without sacrificing comfort or curb appeal," says Neuharth of the shortest integral coach on the North American market. "On 45-foot busses, smaller groups can feel lost. The Temsa coaches feel like a full-size motorcoach with plenty of comfort and legroom."

In addition to the two Temsa coaches, Arrow recently purchased 12 more from other major manufacturers to bring the total fleet size up to 240 busses. The 2012 purchases helped vary the size and style of busses in the Arrow fleet. Today, about 70 percent of Arrow's coaches are 45 feet or longer.

The majority of coaches cruising from Arrow hubs are those manufactured by Motor Coaches Industries based in Schaumburg, Illinois. The two new MCI D4505s and four new MCI J4500s added to Arrow's fleet last year represent 50 percent of the company's fleet expansion, and are intended for serving high-end tours and charters. For example, the newer J4500 coaches in the fleet feature three-point seat belts, elegant wood flooring, Wi-Fi, 110-volt outlets for passenger electronics, chrome mirrors and more.

To complement the Temsa and MCI coaches, Arrow's sizeable fleet also contains coaches from other major forces in the industry: Prevost, Setra and Van Hool. Two newly acquired Prevost H3-45 coaches capitalize on Arrow's desire to offer high-end, premium service and comfort options. These North American made coaches are designed with maximum passenger and driver comfort in mind. The coaches will be dispatched through Arrow's southern region and will be used to transport tours and groups that spend considerable time on the road, including entertainment casts and sports teams.

Prevost's new 56-passenger vehicles feature an electronic stability control, independent front suspension, a tire pressure monitoring system and Liaison — Prevost's Internet-based fleet management service.



Arrow Stage Lines acquired two MCI J4500 coaches in 2009. They were equipped with wheelchair lifts and were some of the first coaches to have three-point seat belts. Arrow recently added two new 2013 J4500s to its fleet.

Popular features for passengers include a premium sound system with five monitors, three-point seat belts, airline-style food trays, 110-volt outlets in each row of seats, and wood-like flooring.

As far as veteran members of the fleet, Arrow prides itself on upkeep and maintenance and is considered among the leaders in refurbishing. In the past year, Arrow undertook an extensive facelift of two Van Hool motorcoaches that had nearly a million miles each on the odometers. These 1999 and 2001 T-2145 coaches received an over-

haul of coach service and mechanicals and were upgraded to comply with 2010 EPA emission standards. Each coach was also retrofitted with new seats, new wood flooring and modern entertainment amenities.

"Our refurbishing gave these coaches five to seven more years on the road," says Neuharth. "Each one has about 800,000 miles." Neuharth is proud to say that Arrow sets the bar both for vehicle upgrades and safety. Three-point seat belts are becoming standard across coaches as well as new technologies for lane departure and electronic

Arrow Stage Lines operates a wide range of buses to fit the needs of different groups. This photo shows the interior in one of the MCI coaches. Arrow even has a J4500 with an ultra luxury interior featuring a rear galley with a Keurig coffee maker as well as other amenities such as wood flooring, Wi-Fi and 110-volt outlets.



stability control. Arrow additionally installs GPS on all coaches. The company has been federally certified and approved as a safe motor carrier through the Transportation Safety Exchange (TSX), and is approved for ground transport through the Department of Defense and Department of Transportation.

"We spend more than \$4 million annually on the critical upkeep of our fleet," says Neuharth. "We use the latest in maintenance software, called VMS, to track miles, efficiencies and costs to provide safe and well-maintained vehicles. We also have the best service mechanics in the industry."

Neuharth credits the safety record and upkeep of the fleet to a team of well-trained and seasoned maintenance staff, led by Gene Wordekemper, a 30-year veteran of Arrow. "Gene is a huge asset for our company," mentions Neuharth. "He contributes in significant ways to the overall motor industry with his knowledge and experience."

The future

With a focus on refurbishing, an eye on new markets and recognition as a top motorcoach transport company, Arrow Stage Lines is well poised to carry on with the entrepreneurial spirit of its founder.

"My hope is that we can continue as a family business and that my kids will be interested in joining the Arrow team," says Luke, who started out as a teen answering phones and cleaning coaches for his great grandfather's company. "I hope to continue to perfect what we've been doing and to be recognized by our customers and peers as one of the top motorcoach companies in America."

Luke applies his business acumen to strategically position coach travel through Arrow to a variety of new and established markets. Green travel is high on the messaging barometer, with statistics showing that travel by bus is the most fuel-efficient way to go. Each coach through Arrow, Luke points out, can carry as many 56 passengers, which keeps that many cars off the road. A typical bus, he says, can travel 100 miles on 17 gallons of fuel. Taking the same number of people 100 miles by car would more than likely use up to 70 gallons of gas.

Newer coaches in the Arrow fleet have shorter idle times and an engine auto shut-off feature. Many newer coaches, too, run on ultra low sulfur diesel or a bio-diesel blend. A tire pressure monitoring system on all coaches helps minimize fuel consumption, and the company also subscribes to recycling services for tires and fluids.

Luxury and ultra-luxury coach services and transport are also becoming increasingly popular as passengers come to expect creature comforts and modern entertainment and electronics while on board.

"It's definitely about changing the perception of people in our generation," says Luke, who graduated from the University of Nebraska about a dozen years ago. "Social media is a great way to get things in front of 30- to 40-year olds, and people even younger. You have to work at the way you market things, rather than allowing perceptions and memories of old charter buses to circulate. We have Wi-Fi, padded seats, flat screens and many other modern conveniences — it is an incredibly great way to travel." □

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The diverse fleet of Arrow Stage Lines has included several Setra coaches over the years. Built in Germany, the Setra coaches allowed Arrow Stage Lines to offer a wide range of coaches to its customers.



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