

# The Krapf Bus Company

Celebrating 65 Years  
with Success  
and Diversity

by Larry Plachno

The Krapf Bus Company, one of the largest and most respected bus companies in the industry, celebrated their 65th anniversary in 2007. Part of their modern management team includes (left to right): Operations Manager Scott Luckowski; Sales Manager Karen Ferry; Safety Supervisor Kevin Pierce, and Gary Krapf, president of Krapf's Coaches. In the background is one of the new Van Hool coaches with special graphics depicting Independence Hall and the Liberty Bell. ABC COMPANIES.



Today, Chester County, Pennsylvania is an area of both residential and commercial growth. Located west of Philadelphia and north of Wilmington, Delaware, West Chester, Pennsylvania was at one time the western end of the interurban railway network radiating from Philadelphia. For more than six decades, Chester County has been the home of The Krapf Bus Company, one of the best known and most respected bus companies in the United States.

In 2007, The Krapf Bus Company celebrated their 65th anniversary. This company deserves special mention since it is easily one of the most successful and most diversified transportation operations in America. In addition to being the largest private

school bus contractor in Pennsylvania, the company has a charter division with a regular motorcoaches, an executive coach and a towncar/limousine operation. Unlike most school bus and coach operators, Krapf's also provides extensive paratransit service and transit service including an unsubsidized transit route. All of this started back in 1942 with a single school bus.

That was the year that the newly created Downingtown School District began eliminating the traditional one-room schoolhouses and replaced them with a central school. However, in order to do this they needed to transport the children from the rural areas. At this time George Krapf Jr. and his wife Eleanor owned a gas station and

garage in Glenmoore and did some farming on the side.

What resulted is that George purchased a school bus and began transporting the school children. Before long, a second school bus was needed and Eleanor drove that one. In the years that followed, George developed an excellent reputation in the school bus business. The small school bus company eventually grew into a large school bus company known as George Krapf Jr. & Sons, Inc. Eleanor continued to drive school buses for 22 years.

The first real diversification took place in the early 1980s and is credited to the second generation of Krapfs. George and Eleanor's sons Dale and Dallas had gotten involved

with the family business at an early age. As with many bus families, they learned to wash and clean buses by the time they started school. In response to repeated requests from customers, Dale and Dallas decided to expand the family operations by going into the coach business. This resulted in a new corporation known as Krapf Coaches, Inc. and the acquisition of the first charter coaches in December of 1982. As a result, the charter business really got underway in 1983.

Like the school bus operation, the coach operation also began to grow under Krapf management. Before long the company had outgrown the original facility in Glenmoore. As a result, Dallas remained in Glenmoore with the George Krapf Jr. & Sons, Inc. school bus operation while Dale moved Krapf Coaches in 1990 to new facilities at 1060 Saunders lane in West Chester. Their modern new building consisted of seven offices, five work stations, a conference room, a training/class room, a reception area, a bunk room and a lunch room totaling 2,400 square feet of office space. In addition, the garage itself represented an additional 10,000 square feet with eight bays and a double length wash bay that recycles the wash/rinse water.

Krapf Coaches was a leader in complying with the accessibility requirements of the Americans With Disabilities Act. An existing coach in the fleet was fitted with a wheelchair lift. As a result, Krapf Coaches became the first bus operator in the Delaware Valley Region to have an accessible coach in operation. It made its first trip on February 25, 1995 when the Lancaster County Chapter of the United Cerebral Palsy chartered it for a nine-day trip to Orlando, Florida.

In subsequent years, Krapf Coaches expanded by both increasing their customer



After 65 years of operation, Krapf's Bus Companies continues to remain a family business. Third generation Gary Krapf (left) serves as president of Krapf's Coaches. On the right is second generation Dale Krapf, chairman of the board of Krapf's Bus Companies. ABC COMPANIES.

base as well acquiring other companies. A more recent expansion was the acquisition of Gregg Bus Service in Yorklyn, Delaware. In addition to Gregg's charter operation they have expanded under contract with the Delaware Transit Corporation (DTC) to provide paratransit service and various fixed route transportation runs. In addition a school bus company in Delaware was formed operating under the name Advanced Student.

Krapf Coaches has expanded in other ways too. In 1996, a Van Hool coach with an executive interior was added to the fleet. The 22-passenger coach with a VIP interior

expanded the company's customer base. It proved successful for special transportation like golf outings, sporting events and corporate travel and an executive coach has remained an important part of the company fleet. In addition to charter service Krapf Coaches also provides scheduled line run service to Atlantic City casinos.

The early fleet was primarily MCI but in more recent years the company has been purchasing other coaches. A Prevost was added in 2001. Their first Van Hool came in 1996. Two new Van Hool C2045 coaches were added to the fleet in 2007. Most of the coaches are based at West Chester while the Gregg operation in Delaware operates 13 coaches.

Another area of expansion has been paratransit services. In 1984, The Krapf Bus Company joined with Chester County to provide paratransit service to county residents. Over the years this has evolved into the Rover Community Transportation system. Offices are located about midway between West Chester and Glenmoore. The system operates more than 75 vehicles on a share-the-ride service covering Chester County. Users include senior citizens, Chester County Handicrafters, Human Services of Chester County members, Medical Assistance cardholders, and SEPTA ADA passengers as well as many others.

Most private bus operators have moved away from local transit operations but the Krapf Bus Company not only got into transit at a relatively late date but also diversified into different kinds of transit operations. This originated in 1992 when Krapf's Transit was founded with the purchase of an existing local bus route called the Route A, that had been operated by another private carrier.

Company founder George Krapf Jr. is shown in front of his Atlantic Gas Station in 1943. The station was located in Guthrieville, Pennsylvania on Lancaster Pike, Route 322. KRAPF'S BUS COMPANIES.



This photo of school bus operations was taken in the snow in 1953 when the company was 11 years old. Left to right: Mechanic Bill Miller, Jack Wolfington and George Krapf Jr. KRAPF'S BUS COMPANIES.





Krapf's took over this route between Coatesville, Downingtown, Exton and West Chester and has developed it with more hours and weekend service. It uses two transit buses to maintain a 60-minute headway. It is a non-funded operation so it relies solely on farebox revenue. This has since expanded with sister services called the Coatesville Link and SCCOOT.

Krapf's became the first private contractor to provide services for a fixed route of the Philadelphia-based Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA). In 1995, the company took over Route 202 public transit line between West Chester and Wilmington. While the vehicles were owned by SEPTA, all drivers, mechanics and administrative personnel for this service are employees of Krapf Coaches. Today, Krapf's operates SEPTA routes 204, 205, 306 and 314.

More recently, Krapf's began operation of the Rambler, in Upper Merion Township. They also have branched out into contract shuttle services. For schools such as Villanova, West Chester and Immaculata Universities, Krapf's handles operations, management, maintenance and insurance. They also provide contract shuttle service for major corporate clients including QVC, IBC, UPS, Wyeth-Ayerst, and Vanguard.

In 1993, the company expanded in yet another direction with the founding of Krapf's Limousine. Originally founded with three stretch Lincoln limousines, the service became popular for weddings, proms, corporate work and other special occasions. Other vehicles were added to the limousine fleet through the years.

George Krapf Jr. passed away in August of 1994 at the age of 82. In the 52 years since he founded the company with one school bus, he had seen it expand into hundreds of vehicles in several different types of service. The second generation of the Krapf family to be involved with the business included George and Eleanor's sons Dale and Dallas and daughter Mardette. Now, a third generation is involved with the company. This includes Dale's sons Brad, Gary and Blake as well as Mardette's son and daughter, Brent and Alison. Dallas and Dale are quick to credit their staff for the company's success.

Today, The Krapf Bus Company is starting its 66th year of operation. From its initial founding in 1942 with a single school bus, the company has grown into a fleet of more than 1,000 vehicles and became one of the most successful and most diversified private bus operations in the United States. Here is a partial list of their current operations.



Lead Mechanic David Houghton works on a few of the buses used in the transit and paratransit operations. There are 40 transit buses in the fleet that transport more than 550,000 passengers annually. Included in the operations is an unsubsidized bus route between Coatesville and West Chester. ABC COMPANIES.

George Krapf Jr. & Sons is the largest private school bus contractor in the state of Pennsylvania transporting more than 65,000 students on more than 800 routes daily. While there are several terminals, operations center on Glenmoore that has 15 bays and nine offices. Krapf's continues to expand, particularly north towards Berks County and Reading. In addition to bidding on school routes, Krapf's will convert a school operation into a Krapf operation.

Krapf's Coaches is primarily based in the West Chester facility with six maintenance bays, two wash bays, and office facilities. The coach division operates 20 motorcoaches, plus limousines, town cars and an executive motorcoach. An additional 13 coaches are based at the Gregg Bus Service garage in Delaware.

Under the direction of Gary Krapf, operations at Krapf's Coaches have changed significantly in the past decade. Faced with the

This MCI 2003 J4500 from the Krapf's Coaches fleet was photographed on November 9, 2007 while on charter in New York City. The location is Fort Tryon Park. Krapf's Coaches operates both MCI D and J models. J.C. REBIS JR.





Work is being completed on the rear wheel of one of the smaller buses. In addition to their own fleet, Krapf's also operates services for government agencies, private companies and schools. ABC COMPANIES.



This modern sign outside of the Krapf building reads: "Professional Drivers Making the Difference." Starting from a single school bus in 1942, Krapf Bus Companies has grown into a major operation in Pennsylvania. The company celebrated its 65th anniversary in 2007. ABC COMPANIES.

challenge of increasing competition because of deregulation, the coach operation began to downsize and move in the direction of diversification and higher class service. Due to the transit and paratransit operations, Krapf's has been able to offer a wide selection of vehicles and services that meet the needs of smaller groups and specialized applications. Efforts were directed at looking for new and different ways to increase revenue, controlling costs, and offering value to customers.

While the coach operation was downsized, it was also upgraded with a more modern fleet. Krapf's continues to offer executive coach service using a Van Hool coach with a special interior. New coaches have been made more attractive with exterior graphics and wrappers. Some buses now offer satellite TV. While Krapf's continues to operate MCI D and J models, they recently purchased two

new Van Hool C2045 coaches. Gary Krapf says that they are very pleased with the Van Hool coaches because of their customer appeal.

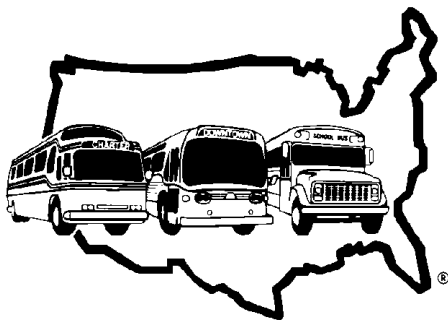
The transit division has grown to over 40 transit vehicles in the fleet transporting more than 550,000 passengers annually. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that Krapf's continues to operate their unsubsidized Route A between Coatesville, Downingtown, Exton and West Chester. Fares vary by zone and the line transports more than 1,000 passengers daily.

The extensive Rover operation is provided for Chester County. This paratransit system serves the entire county and beyond and operates a fleet of more than 75 vehicles.

The future? The people at Krapf Bus Companies see more of a need for smaller

vehicles in their increasingly suburban communities and are looking forward to an increase in charter business. Alternative fuels are on the horizon. Krapf currently uses biodiesel for three school districts that are environmentally conscious. They have also used bio-diesel in coaches for special trips and expect regular use in the future by one of their university customers.

Krapf Bus Companies are now in their third generation of Krapf management. Their basic goal remains the same after 65 years: providing quality, safe transportation for their customers. They plan on keeping commitments to clients, the local community, and their staff while continuing to invest in safety, quality equipment, professional drivers and a courteous staff. □



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