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Fullington family raises the bar again with new MCI coaches, graphics, management approach



by Ann Stockham

Photos courtesy of Fullington Auto Bus and MCI

Fullington Auto Bus recently decided to add two new coaches to their fleet. After looking at various alternatives, the decision was made to purchase these two MCI J4500 coaches. Both coaches carry a new graphic design as well as the Trailways logo.

Family businesses have been the backbone of the bus industry since the Mack brothers introduced the first motorized 13-passenger coach to the U.S. market in 1902. Today, one of those early entrepreneurial families, Fullington, is forging a new path with a fourth generation guided by a driving ambition to provide quality service to its customers.

Fullington Auto Bus was founded by Emerson Fullington in 1908 with a horse-drawn surrey, an offshoot of a lumber delivery business. Subsequent leaders included Richard Fullington, then John Richard Fullington Sr., who retired last year at age 84 after helping to build a company that now includes 450 employees, 200 school buses, 48 coaches, nine limousines and eight locations across Pennsylvania (five school bus garages and three motorcoach repair facilities).

Today, Fullington Auto Bus Co., a member of the Trailways system, is led by Emerson Fullington's great-grandchildren Aerial Fullington Weisman, president and

CEO; and Michael L. Fullington, vice president and COO. Other key family members include Michael's wife, April "Lory" Fullington, vice president of tours, charters and school bus services; and Aerial's husband, Milton H. Weisman, director of intercity operations.

Team Fullington

"Our name is on those buses, and that brings with it a huge responsibility," said Fullington Weisman, who joined the Clearfield, Pennsylvania, company in February 2003 after a career in cardiac nursing and medical sales. A believer in the team approach, she credits the perseverance of the company in recent years to the operational expertise of her brother, Michael, who has been with the company for nearly 30 years, and Michael's wife, Lory, a 25-year Fullington veteran. Michael utilizes his vast knowledge of operations and his strong relationships with other bus operators to be able to run the business more efficiently and effectively. "Lory is our ambassador," said Fullington Weisman. "Her knowledge base

is held in high regard both inside and outside the company."

Other key staff include Terry M. Welker, director of maintenance and facilities; Charles E. Schenck, director of limousine services and insurance; and Michael D. Peduzzi, vice president and CFO.

Said Fullington Weisman, "We have a team motto: 'Together Everyone Achieves More.' When we do things, we ask, 'How can we do it better?' And when a decision is made, the team considers how it will affect all of the employees to be sure it is for the good of the whole company."

Lately, the Fullingtons have been making a lot of decisions.

Taking a closer look

"We're scrutinizing every process and business decision right down to where we buy fuel," said Fullington Weisman. The company is looking more closely at how it purchases fuel, tires, parts, seats, and even new

motorcoaches — and that sometimes means questioning its longest-standing relationships.

In addition, Fullington has lately modernized its marketing activities with a radio campaign, updated eye-catching tour brochures, and a new Web site design. Soon all coaches will sport patriotic decal exteriors by Turbo Images, and many coaches are being refitted with new seats.

Fullington's tour division has been fine-tuned to include day trips to popular venues such as to NASCAR events, casinos, New York City and beach trips. The company has also been forming strategic relationships with other vendors, such as travel agents. By providing the domestic ground transportation for cruises and other vacation packages, Fullington continues to expand its service market.

"Baby boomers have discretionary income, and they're retiring," said Lory Fullington. "If someone hasn't taken a bus tour before, new tours introduce them to the busing industry today. They realize it's a comfortable and convenient mode of transportation."

To further attract baby boomers, Fullington even offers limousine excursions. "We want to get the baby boomers to start thinking about group travel," said Lory Fullington. "A limousine trip gets their foot in our door."

Though school transportation and tour and charter operations together account for about 90 percent of Fullington's business, the company continues to offer Trailways schedule service, tapping into the Trailways network while traveling around the country.

"We find our Trailways affiliation to be very rewarding," said Fullington Weisman. "Trailways allow us to extend our team and services beyond our operation. It works well



The history of Fullington Auto Bus dates back to 1908 when operations started with a horse-drawn surrey. Shown here is a 1929 GMC bus which has been restored by the company and is now on display. An older 1915 White bus is on display in Hershey, Pennsylvania.

for us when we're traveling outside our market area, especially if we need maintenance assistance or fueling. They're a nice family of companies that works together for the good of all."

Putting MCI to the test

Even as a loyal 20-year MCI customer, the Fullington family did not just automatically turn to MCI when it came time to add to its 40-plus motorcoach fleet. Instead, they shopped around.

"We inspected every competitive model," said Michael Fullington. "And we called other operators for their input on models and the new ZF AS Tronic transmission."

In the end, Fullington chose two MCI J4500s with ZF AS Tronic transmissions, delivered in March. Management knows it made the right choice. "The drivers are thrilled," said Fullington Weisman. "Passengers are fighting over which group gets to ride these buses. There hasn't been any moss growing under their wheels since they arrived."

"We bought the J4500 for its curb appeal, fuel efficiency and reliability. We also bought them because of Greg Lukas and his MCI team. They're knowledgeable and wonderful to work with."

Fullington Weisman noted of MCI, "Whenever we've made a request of them, they've come through."

This shows a portion of the Fullington offices at State College, Pennsylvania. Company management is now in its fourth generation.



Fullington Auto Bus built this new and very modern terminal at State College in 1999. It is used by tour groups and offers plenty of free parking.



In recent years, Fullington Auto Bus has operated several MCI coaches. Here are several Fullington MCI coaches shown in the former red paint scheme of Fullington Trailways.



State College bound

For now, Fullington's new J4500s are in service based out of the company's facility in State College, Pennsylvania. The 16,000-square foot facility is new, built by Fullington in 1999 to better serve tour and charter groups in the area.

"We outgrew our initial State College location," said Lory Fullington. "Now there is plenty of parking for our travelers, and I know they really enjoy coming here."

The State College facility displays one of Fullington's earlier coaches, a 1929 GMC, as

Here is an interior view of one of the new J4500 coaches. Special equipment includes a video system to entertain passengers on longer charters and tours.



a reminder of its deep heritage in the community and to Penn State University – alma mater of many a Fullington.

Fullington's 1915 White bus is on display at the Antique Automobile Club of America Museum, Hershey, Pennsylvania where Dick Fullington Sr. is an active member and on the board of directors.

It is the kind of touch that keeps the newest generation of Fullingtons well aware of its roots as well as its duties. "Dick

Sr. and Tillie instilled in us a strong work ethic and to always think of others," said Fullington Weisman. "As the owners of the company, Michael and I continue to embrace all of our employees as our extended family."

For the customers, coworkers, community and all who constitute those "others," it is a philosophy that makes everyone associated with Fullington Trailways feel they have come out ahead. □

One of the new MCI J4500 coaches is shown adjacent to Beaver Stadium at Penn State University. The new J4500 coaches boast a new paint scheme which incorporates an American flag as well as the Trailways logo.



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