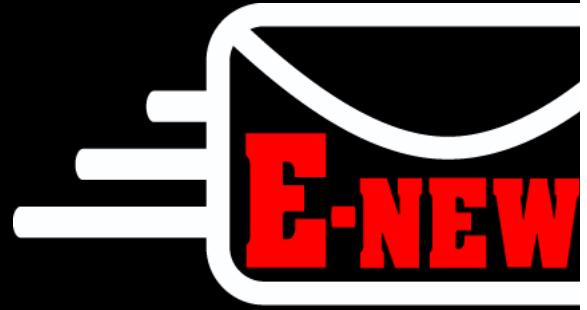




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PEOPLE

Hats Off to These Winners: 2004 Operator of the Year Finalists

LCT Staff



| Posted on February 1, 2004

These Operator of the Year finalists deserve our recognition and applause for a job well done. These entrepreneurs work hard to exceed customer expectations. Each offers unique services, provides specialized training programs, or has developed procedures that they credit for their success over the years. The OOTY application process is complex; nominees are judged on staff/chauffeur training, innovative services, safety records, customer relations and industry involvement.

From the scores of applications submitted, the LCT staff recommends three finalists in each category. The winners will be announced at the LCT Show in Las Vegas later this month.



Small Operators

Hire Quality Limousine, Fallston, Md.

Fleet size: 9

Barbara Ballard, president

Snapshot: New chauffeurs are assigned a driving partner

Hire Quality Limousine knows that a big-city address and a large staff hardly illustrate a company's worth. With six drivers and three office staff, Hire Quality has become the largest limousine operator in Harford County, Md.

Through exemplary dedication to the community and competitors in the limousine industry, Barbara Ballard has earned her stripes and referrals the old fashioned way.

Behind their desks, Barbara and husband Mike Ballard work double-duty. They serve as president, vice president, fleet manager and office manager. A third office member, Michelle Richardson, juggles three hats as the receptionist, reservationist and dispatcher.

"Because of our small size, there is no doubt that all employees understand the importance of their position," Barbara said. "Ultimately it doesn't matter what your position is; all of us are here to serve one very important person, the customer."

Chauffeurs for Hire Quality are required to present a 10-year certified driving record and must pass a criminal background check before being issued a license by the state Public Service Commission. Once issued, etiquette training and road tests will determine how quickly the driver is scheduled for service.



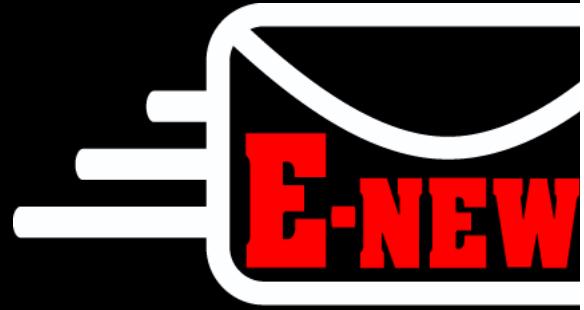


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with vehicle loans when cars are down for maintenance, and swapped referrals through community organizations.

Special Occasions Limousine, Asheville, NC.

Fleet size: 10

Steve Cottle, CFO, and Robin Cottle, COO

Snapshot: Giving back to their community

Serving the Western North Carolina area for more than 15 years, Special Occasions Limousine started in 1987 with one car for service to proms and weddings. Since then, Steve and Robin Cottle have grown the business into a full-service company that is now the exclusive ground transportation provider at the Asheville Regional Airport.

"We've worked diligently to elevate the position of limousine and chauffeured transportation in Western North Carolina," Robin Cottle said. "We have reinvented our service to help business travelers who no longer travel by air; we answer every question with a 'yes' in an effort to satisfy our customers; we maintain a new car fleet; and we dress our chauffeurs in uniforms. All of these things help to elevate the entire industry – and set us apart from our competition."

A comprehensive employee handbook details every aspect of working for Special Occasions, including introductions and reference material on vehicle safety and maintenance, the company's drug-free policy, customer service training, required dress code, and extended trip guidelines.

A thorough background check, written test and regular company meetings round out the continuous improvement policy for the company.

The Cottles also know the importance of giving back to their community and make it a corporate priority for Special Occasions Limousine. They provide services for fund-raising events and are actively involved in area charities, in addition to serving as the community ambassador with the local chamber of commerce.

Two Step Limousine, Littleton, Colo.

Fleet Size: 5

Barbara Curtis, president

Snapshot: "People expect ultimate professionalism"

Not just a "step ahead of the competition," Two Step Limousine got its name by working to be "two steps ahead of the pack." Under the helm of Barbara Curtis, company president and former



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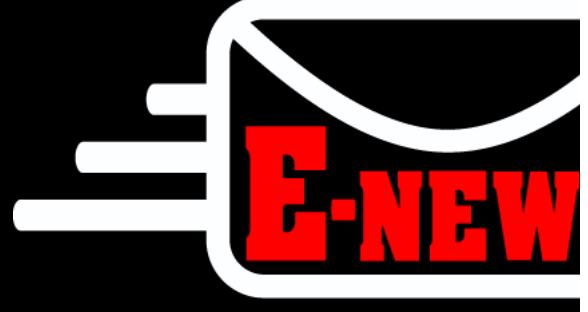
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In addition, Two Step was named "One of the top three wedding companies in Denver" by Denver's 5280 Magazine, an honor the company has received for the last six years.

Curtis' success doesn't stop there – under her leadership, the Limousine Association of Denver enjoyed a solid 100% increase in members and 500% increase in vendor members.

This is the second year in a row that Two Step has been a finalist in the Operator of the Year competition.

Curtis referred to her son's terrible experience as a high school prom attendee as her incentive to begin the business. She credits her added touches and specialized service for the reason that customers return.

"They all want consistency," she said. "People want to know what to expect. And when you're providing a luxury service, people expect ultimate professionalism."

MEDIUM OPERATORS

ABC Chauffeured Limousines, Sedans, Minibuses and Vans, San Mateo, Calif.

Fleet Size: 20

Don Mahnke, president

Snapshot: "Breadth of our fleet ... diversity of our programs"

Because commitment to quality is important to ABC, nearly half of its fleet was purchased in the past 24 months; up-to-date technology is installed in every vehicle; and staff is continuously trained throughout their employment.

"In addition to having a diverse fleet, we have an in-house mechanic who guarantees that our vehicles are in top operational condition at all times," said owner Don Mahnke.

"This becomes complicated when each vehicle is equipped with a GPS system, cellular phones, and the ability to track and deliver changes electronically. Our mechanic is outstanding."

Quality also extends into staff training. Beginning with an employee manual that provides basic reference on company policies and procedures, chauffeurs at ABC receive audio-visual training, etiquette lessons and city/tourist training.

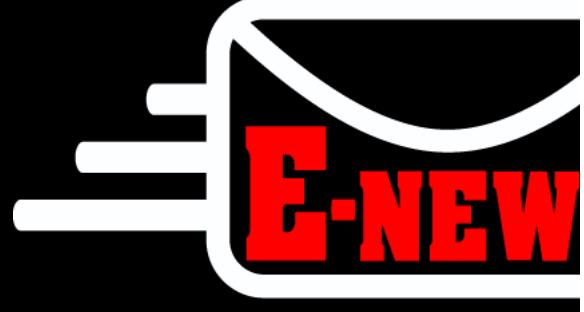
ABC continues to build relationships in the community by offering several corporate and tour options, including an industry incentive program, corporate/team building program, chauffeured area tours, convention coordinator programs and familiarization trips for travel agents.



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limousine. Since then, the full-service livery operator has become one of Detroit's largest and is part of a worldwide network of transportation professionals.

Jarvis credits her success to passionate dedication to the customer, keen focus on safety, and continuous improvement through training.

"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," a golden rule in any business, is one that Aristocat lives by. "I truly care about and respect other people. When they hire a limousine service they are likely celebrating something special. It is our job to help them with their celebration and be transparent at the same time," Jarvis added.

Safety is a concern for all responsible limousine operators, but Aristocat takes safety education to its customers as well. Brochures are delivered to local high schools prior to prom season, drivers are regularly trained on vehicle safety procedures, and company policies are strict regarding underage drinking and rowdy customers to ensure the safety of all passengers. These policies are reviewed with customers when they make a reservation, and are apparently paying off – Aristocat hasn't had an accident or safety claim in more than four years.

Training takes many forms at Aristocat. Employees are regularly educated on issues involving marketing, selling, quoting jobs, proper follow up, conflict resolution, emergency procedures, dispatching and accident policies.

All new processes are documented in the employee handbook, a policy manual that according to the company's owner has grown in volume along with the business.

"I believe training is the very most important part of owning a successful operation," Jarvis said.

Touch of Class Limo, Madera, Calif.

Fleet Size: 14

Deena Papagni, president

Snapshot: Innovative marketing and customer service

One can never take back a first impression," said Touch of Class Limo owner **Deena Papagni**. "From our extensive chauffeur training to the hand-written thank you notes, we pay attention to the importance of small details and how they make a positive impression on our clients."

Since 1990, Touch of Class has created innovative programs that meet the needs of its clients in Central California. With so much concern over flying and long security lines, many travelers are opting for new ways to celebrate.

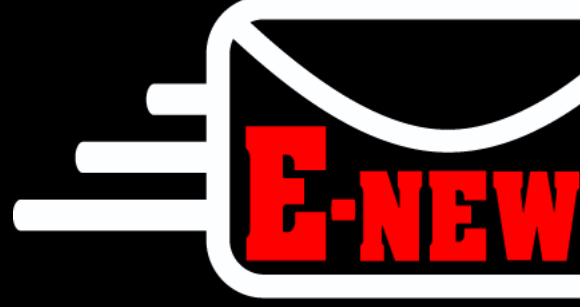


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be treated accordingly."

LARGE OPERATORS

Each of the finalists in the large fleet category is, ironically, named Robert. None, however, cited this as a determining factor in their success.

Concorde Limousine, Freehold, N.J.

Fleet Size: 55

Robert Bellagamba, president

Snapshot: New meeting and conference department

One of the most modern and diverse fleets in the industry, Concorde Limousine didn't always have the 55-vehicle presence it enjoys today. Starting in 1984, the company has grown from one stretch limousine to a diverse fleet of sedans, limousines, SUVs, vans and minibuses. For many of these 20 years, owner [Bob Bellagamba](#) has been innovative in marketing his business and introducing new programs and services to the New Jersey community.

In 1987, Concorde established the industry's first ground transportation "frequent rider" program offered by certain airlines. Class 1 Club is a reward program for loyal clients, allowing them to accumulate points that are redeemable for free rides, upgrades and/or Concorde gift certificates.

Just last year, Concorde introduced a meeting and conference department to service the needs of corporate conference attendees in the area. This new department is directly responsible for coordinating and providing the ground transportation for the company's growing corporate clients.

"This program, in combination with our new Web site and real-time Internet reservations, has helped to grow our corporate business by 15% since January of last year," Bellagamba said.

RMA Chauffeured Transportation, Rockville, Md.

Fleet Size: 60

Robert Alexander, president

Snapshot: Industry and community involvement

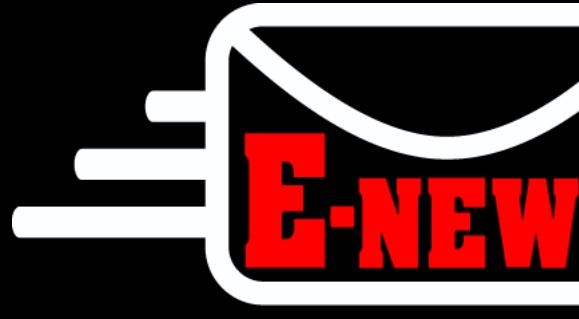
RMA's owner, [Robert Alexander](#), has worked tirelessly to increase the visibility of the limousine industry on a local and national level. Lobbying on Capitol Hill regarding policies that affect operators, chairing the Limousine 20 Group, founding The Success Group, and participating in countless industry associations and community organizations are just a few of the time-consuming responsibilities that Alexander manages with ease.



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Best Limousine & Transportation, Huntington Beach, Calif.

Fleet Size: 34

Robert Vaughan, president

Snapshot: Led the way on rate growth

For the past nine years, [Robert Vaughan](#) has directed the day-to-day operations at Best Limousine & Transportation. Through a combination of innovative thinking and strong leadership, Vaughan has led Best to the leadership position in Southern California that it enjoys today.

Established in 1994, Best has been an example in innovation to its fellow Southern California operators. Much to the surprise of local operators, Best recently increased service rates. The unexpected result of more business proved that customers were willing to pay a bit more for excellent professional service. Local livery companies took note and quickly followed suit.

"As the saying goes, imitation is the greatest form of flattery," Vaughan said.

Another Best practice was the implementation of the Best Event Service Team. The company's event planning capabilities range from brainstorming to planning, event setup to running the entire event for the customer. Best team members can now borrow from the company's years of industry association membership to deliver client services that are second to none.

Best Limousine was previously a finalist for Operator of the Year.

VOICES OF THE INDUSTRY: Association Award of Excellence Nominees

Florida Limousine Association

Members: 59

President: [Carla Boroday](#)

Snapshot: Actively helping local charities

Founded in 1986, the Florida Limousine Association has been working successfully since then to promote open communication between industry members and local/state government.

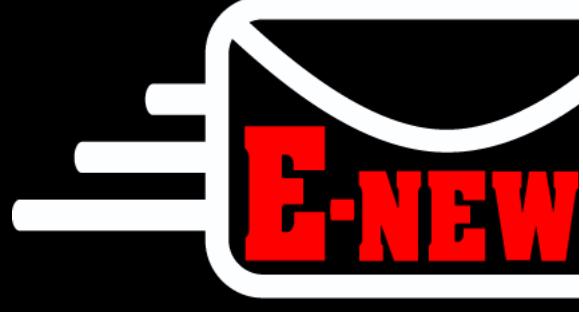
Its efforts include inviting government agencies to monthly meetings, hosting transportation symposiums in three South Florida counties, and recruiting new members through its open-door meeting policy.



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Georgia Limousine Association

Members: 72

President: Frank Monteith

Snapshot: Working to foster an atmosphere of unity

The Georgia Limousine Association prides itself on serving its members and the local chauffeured transportation industry. It has worked to foster an atmosphere of unity in the industry, has led the way in charitable contributions and has established strong ties with several government agencies.

GLA holds key seats on the Atlanta Airport Transportation Task Force and meets regularly with the Georgia Department of Motor Vehicle Safety.

All new and current members must produce documentation, which is verified, indicating their legitimacy.

The association also works at keeping members informed through newsletters, fax blasts, e-mails and phone calls and is currently putting together a series of educational Limo 101 workshops for members and others.

The association's charitable work includes recent hosting of two major events for worthy local causes:

- The Fireman's Children's Burn Foundation was provided with nearly 25 limousines to give a day of transportation to young patients.
- Thirty-five children at the Egleston Children's Cancer Center (Ronald McDonald House) and their families were picked up by 35 limousines and taken to a private viewing of the local Christmas Festival of Trees.

Nassau Suffolk Limousine Association

Members: 120

President: Peter Giordano

Snapshot: Keeping the community informed

As one of the largest limousine associations, the NSLA has recently started a "Board Delegate" program where each board member was charged with keeping 15 members informed on key issues throughout the year.

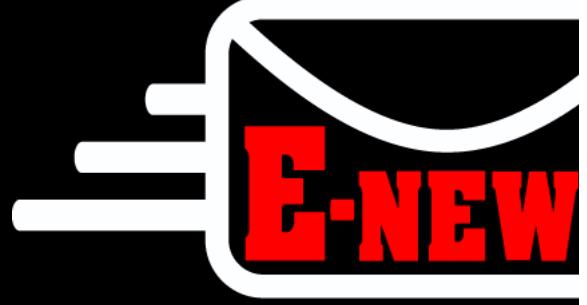


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Also, bimonthly meetings are held to provide industry updates, networking opportunities and membership drives. And open meetings, held twice each year, provide an opportunity for non-members to hear about the benefits of joining the association.

- *Profiles complied by Angela Jurson, Beverly Braga and Yvonne Klopping.*

Related Topics: [Barbara Curtis](#), [Bob Bellagamba](#), [Carla Boroday](#), [Deena Papagni](#), [Don Mahnke](#), [Robert Alexander](#), [Robert Vaughan](#)



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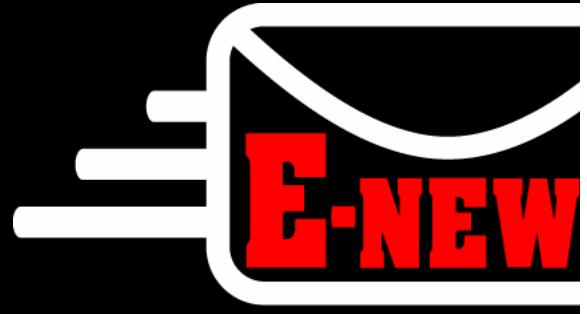


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eNews Exclusive: Chuck Covington has had many roles, each of which have taught him how to run his business better.



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2020 International LCT Show Sees New Faces

The annual trade event produced excellent education and networking opportunities for veterans and first-timers alike.



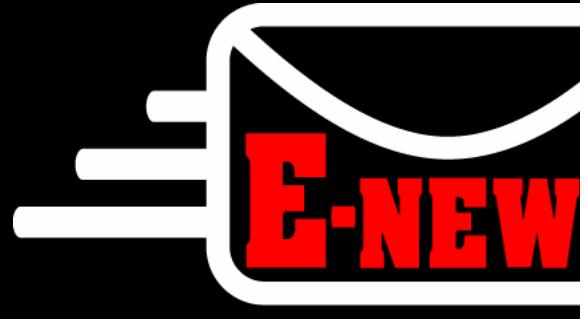


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GCLA Hires Sara Eastwood-Richardson

The former publisher of LCT Magazine will now lead the Greater California Livery Association to new heights.



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The annual LCT Operator of the Year Awards recognize the latest and most current in business achievement.



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ILCT Show Takes Attendees Into A Productive Lane

HIGHLIGHTS: This year's streamlined event reminded operators of what really matters the most in serving ground transportation clients and each other.



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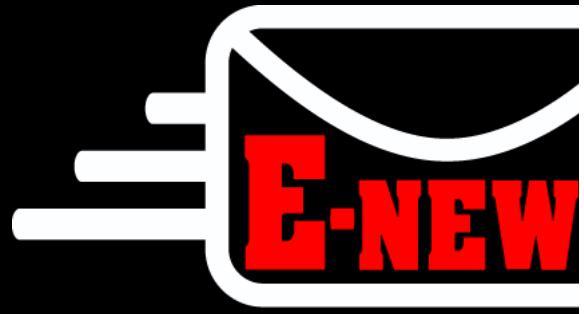
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