

GO Riteway Continues Moving Forward as the Third Generation Assumes a Greater Role in the Family Business



By Heidi Fendos | Sept. 25, 2013

GERMANTOWN, Wis. – When Roland (Rollie) and Pearl Bast founded Riteway Bus Service in 1957, they purchased four school buses to service the newly created Germantown school district.

Today, the company has 595 school buses which provide transportation for 25 school districts, 12 charter schools and 35 parochial schools in southeastern and central Wisconsin. GO Riteway also currently has ten school bus terminals in Cedarburg, Columbus, Edgerton, Germantown, Milton, Milwaukee, Oak Creek, Portage, Random Lake, and Slinger.

However, the company's impressive growth doesn't end there. In addition to its school bus fleet, GO Riteway also owns and operates 48 airport shuttles, 27 motorcoaches, 21 executive sedans, 15 mini-coaches, five limos and limo coaches, three executive SUVs (a fourth is being prepared for the road), two executive coaches, and two limos coaches, and employs over 900 people.

So what has been the driving force behind GO Riteway? You could say a labor of love passed down from Rollie and Pearl to their two children, Ron Bast, president and Rochelle Bast, vice president. And now Ron's two children, Wendy and R.J. Bast, are preparing themselves for the huge job of leading GO Riteway into the future.

Hopping on the Bus

Working permanently at Riteway wasn't always part of career plans for R.J. and Wendy. While both grew up seeing their grandma Pearl deliver cookies to the drivers and having their entire family talk about business matters over the dinner table, it was never expected that they would become a permanent part of it.

"Dad always made it clear that he wanted us both to get our college degrees and to make our own career decisions, whatever they might be," says Wendy. "He was totally supportive of us pursuing our own dreams."

As a result, in 1992 RJ went to UW-Stevens Point to earn a bachelor's degree in Business and upon his graduation, was hired by a bank. Likewise, Wendy went to Carroll College and earned a degree in social work in 1993. It wasn't until both had worked in their designated careers for a while that they both started feeling unfulfilled by their career choices.

When Wendy was between jobs, her aunt Rochelle offered her a temporary position as her assistant

until she found something else. Wendy decided to take her up on this offer, and enjoyed working with Rochelle so much she stayed on permanently. After 1 ½ years at the bank, R.J. also left his job to go where he knew he could make a difference, Riteway.

However, future success in the family business wasn't guaranteed. Wendy and R.J. both were treated like regular employees and were told they would need to prove themselves in order to move up. That's when both dug in their heels to learn the business and also pursued their executive MBAs at UW-Milwaukee to show they were serious in their decisions to join the family business.

Wendy started assisting in human resources and today she oversees both the Human Resources and Safety departments. R.J. started working under Ron's guidance in operations and now is able to smile as he reflects on the company's growth and visions for the future.

Benefits of Being in a Family Business

Both R.J. and Wendy say being able to work with and learn from their dad and aunt is a blessing.

"They've been such wonderful mentors to us and taught us so much," says Wendy. "Grandpa would be so proud of them. They've taught us that when it comes to running a successful family business, you have to be honest and deal with problems in a straightforward manner. If you make a mistake, you just need to admit it and move on. There are always issues to overcome, but you have to just learn to work through it together."

R.J. adds, "It's also been great as a family to have the ability to decide together what we believe is best for our business. In the 1980s, Ron and Rochelle sat with Grandpa and made the decision together to expand into the motorcoach division. That forever changed our business. Since Wendy and I have been on board, we've worked with Ron and Rochelle to determine the advantages of adding various mini-buses, limousines, sedans, executive sedans and SUVs to our fleet.

"We have a certain level of flexibility that public companies can't have due to their corporate structures," he said. "We can quickly expand our focus to where we see the best opportunities by simply sitting down together and having a constructive conversation. We don't have a lot of hoops we need to jump through."

Looking Down the Road

As Ron and Rochelle look toward the future and consider the idea of semi-retirement, Wendy and R.J. know they still have much to learn from the previous generation.

"Our grandpa founded this company on a strong work ethic, and Ron and Rochelle have done a great job of continuing this philosophy, as well as passing it down to us," says Wendy.

"Grandpa built his business on some basic business principles such as honesty, integrity and a commitment to always treat both our employees and customers with respect. Ron and Rochelle have continued this philosophy and reinforced its importance to Wendy and me," adds R.J.

"These basic values continue to guide us in our everyday dealings and have allowed us to become an industry leader while making a positive difference within the communities we serve."

Growth

Working together over the past three years, the Bast family has achieved notable growth for their business despite the tough economy. In October 2010, they purchased GO Airport Connection, which services Mitchell International and is the only airport shuttle service in the Milwaukee area.

According to Ron Bast, it was an ideal fit and allowed the company to expand its services and better meet the needs of their customers. In 2011, the company also rebranded itself, changing its name to GO Riteway Transportation Group.

In addition, the company is now the official transportation provider for the Milwaukee Bucks and The American Club (Kohler, Wis.) as well as the winner of 18 industry and environmental awards since 2009. GO Riteway is focused on environmental sustainability by incorporating propane-powered and hybrid vehicles into their fleet.

It is also considered a major southeastern employer with more than 900 employees.

“Under Ron and Rochelle’s leadership we’ve definitely become a respected leader in the transportation industry,” says Wendy. “But we can’t rest on our laurels. We need to continue to work hard to be the most dependable and safest transportation provider for business travelers, tourists, students and local residents.

“This means continuing to service our school districts with the high standards they have come to expect from us while working with business owners, the airport and convention center, to make sure that their guests coming to Milwaukee are having a positive experience so they will want to return and keep our business moving forward.”