

BEST PRACTICES

make perfect at GO Riteway Transportation Group

Founded in 1957 by Rollie and Pearl Bast with just four school buses, today GO Riteway is a staple in the Wisconsin student transportation system. Now the company is making a move to expand their "gold standard" level of service into the tour and charter markets in the surrounding tri-state area. With two recent acquisitions including Indiana-based Cardinal Buses and central Wisconsin's Lazers Bus, GO Riteway continues to practice and perfect the art of being a premiere, preferred transportation provider in the region.

Currently in its third generation of family leadership, co-owners and Vice Chairs, Wendy and RJ Bast preside over a staff of 1600, with 25 locations operating across the Midwest. As one of the region's largest and most reliable school bus operations, GO Riteway serves over 35 school districts throughout Wisconsin. The long-term contracts are based on loyalty and trust achieved through decades of quality performance. On the charter side of business, GO Riteway has moved thousands of passengers for leading Fortune 500 companies throughout the Midwest and United States, and reports that repeat business has been a mainstay of their operation throughout its history. With so many movements on a daily basis, GO Riteway often "subcontracts from their own fleet" during extra heavy duty-cycles, RJ Bast said.

Managing a fleet of 1300 vehicles including school buses, motorcoaches, shuttles, limo coaches, executive sedans and vans, the Basts agree that with steady growth comes greater complexity. In recent years, Bob Zanotti, a former FedEx executive has been brought on board to serve as GO Riteway Transportation Group President. Along with the big-picture business perspective Mr. Zanotti brings



Van Hools are part of both Cardinal and GO Riteway fleets.



From top: Wendy Bast, RJ Bast & Bob Zanotti

to the company, the Bast siblings agree that his values and vision are perfectly aligned with the organization and its strategic plans for continued expansion. Their father, GO Riteway Chairman Ron Bast and his sister Vice-Chair Rochelle Bast also continue to keep a guiding hand in the business as they support the transition to the next generation of family ownership.

Safety First at the core of best practices

“One of the hallmarks of our family-owned business is a hands-on approach and we are very fortunate to benefit from Bob’s remarkable background and management acumen,” said Wendy Bast.

GO Riteway is keenly focused on honing best practices throughout all functional areas of the company from management practices and dispatch procedures to customer service and most importantly maintaining the highest safety standards. A team consisting of seven safety leaders, oversee passenger, driver and equipment safety – monitoring and ensuring that safety and compliance standards are met across all locations. A variety of programs and protocols are employed to uphold the company’s consistently excellent track record. And, proprietary policies and procedures are used to ensure that everyone in the company is in sync with the top safety priority. The GO Riteway safety program integrates technology and regularly scheduled driver training and retraining to ensure that its stringent standards are being met.

Like most operators, GO Riteway is challenged with driver recruitment, and they work closely with new recruits, and existing staff to engage and retain a highly-trained, professional driver pool. Technologies such as onboard and outward facing camera systems help to manage, monitor and analyze fleet assets and driver behavior.

“We place a high value on our driver employees and are diligent about training, retraining and consistently reinforcing our driver skills, with additional emphasis on customer service and maintaining professionalism with our passengers,” said RJ Bast.

Data captured from camera systems used within the fleet have been invaluable in helping GO Riteway safety directors determine the true nature of driver behavior and when to take appropriate actions to correct or exonerate drivers depending on the conditions as recorded, Bast said.

Engaging employees and customers

Another unique aspect of employee engagement is the “employee survey” which is deployed annually to all staff at each location. With the intent of better understanding how best to motivate and engage its employees, especially with so many locations, GO Riteway assesses survey results and creates action plans that are designed to align and continuously improve the company culture.

“We want our people to know that they come first, and to better understand what motivates them, how existing policies and procedures impact them, as well as identify areas for improvement,” Zanotti said. “We believe that by taking care of our people, they in turn will take care of our customers, and that is a win for everyone.”

Likewise, GO Riteway conducts customer surveys to the entire customer base on both the retail and institutional sides of the business. Teams including one of the Bast family members, regional managers and Mr. Zanotti meet with customers each year and use the survey to discuss and address key issues.

“Our customers really appreciate this proactive approach, they know we take accountability and that we are willing to put whatever resources are needed to resolve problems and make it right,” Zanotti said. Conversely, the company also celebrates great customer outcomes and builds on the company culture with employee recognition and customer events throughout the year.

Organized for expansion

Standardizing operations, policies and procedures across all Go Riteway locations is an ongoing strategic initiative. Along with the development of best practices to be shared with all locations, the company is also undergoing a multi-phased systems integration project designed to create a unified platform for communications, business intelligence, as well as key operations activities. Connected HR systems, accounting, communications and fleet management will all contribute to helping Go Riteway optimize operations and fleet response times, according to Zanotti. With the goal to simplify and streamline business activities, Zanotti said he is excited to leverage synergies across the organization as they work hard to drive more efficiency through operations, and help the company poised for future expansion.

Focused on growth

As the industry continues to consolidate and downsize, the Basts look to take advantage of strategic opportunities that will enable them to better serve the traveling private and public sectors. The company is actively seeking growth, and the timing is perfect for acquisition according to both Wendy and RJ Bast. ➤



The GO Riteway fleet features Van Hool CX45s.

"GO Riteway has sustained steady growth year in and out for over 60 years," Wendy Bast said. "We believe that sharing our best practices is the key to successfully integrating new locations as we expand the GO Riteway regional footprint. We look for like-minded operators who are ready to partner, with the understanding that we will continue to treat their staff, as they have."

Furthermore, retaining the original staff is a strategic imperative when seeking out expansion opportunities say the Basts. And in both recent acquisitions of Cardinal Buses and Lazers, they have achieved that goal.

"We are extremely excited to add both of these great companies to the GO Riteway team, which has allowed us to dramatically expand our service and manage large group moves throughout the Midwest region," RJ Bast said.

GORiteway runs a mixed fleet of motorcoaches and has most recently purchased two new Van Hool CX35 models from ABC Companies to be used in the Cardinal Buses operation.

"There is great parity between our companies in terms of ethics and values, and ABC looks forward to supporting GO Riteway's continued success with the full scope of products and services we offer," said John McFarlane, senior account manager at ABC.

The company keeps the fleet fresh by updating models approximately every four years. Coaches are typically specified with the latest passenger and driver amenities to enhance safety and the overall transport experience. Drive Cams, adaptive cruise control, 360° cameras, telematics and more, help GO Riteway safety managers do their job more effectively, but these tools are also viewed as sophisticated technology features that can be utilized to entice new driver recruits.

"Onboard technology can be intimidating to drivers initially," Wendy Bast said, "however, that perspective changes quickly when drivers realize how the technology can really improve their performance and the passenger experience."

Of course, maintaining the fleet for peak performance and safety is also a top priority at GO Riteway.

With a maintenance group of over 50 mechanics, shops are located both regionally and locally – including five motorcoach service facilities. Major maintenance and overhaul work, as well as scheduled maintenance and minor repairs is all managed and executed by GO Riteway's expert team of technicians who are trained to perform

service and repairs on school buses, motorcoaches, minicoaches, black car fleet vehicles and more.

The Basts affirm that they are primed to take the business to the next level by committing to best practices, reinvestment, technology, and most importantly by emulating the business ethics that have helped their family succeed for the past six decades.

"Regardless of the scope or size of our organization now or in the future, family values, integrity and respect will always be the compass we steer by at GO Riteway," RJ Bast said. **BR**



From left: GO Riteway Vice-Chair siblings RJ Bast & Wendy Bast and GO Riteway President Bob Zanotti