

By Sharon Verbeten

Beep, beep, yeah!

Lamers Bus Lines sees smooth ride ahead

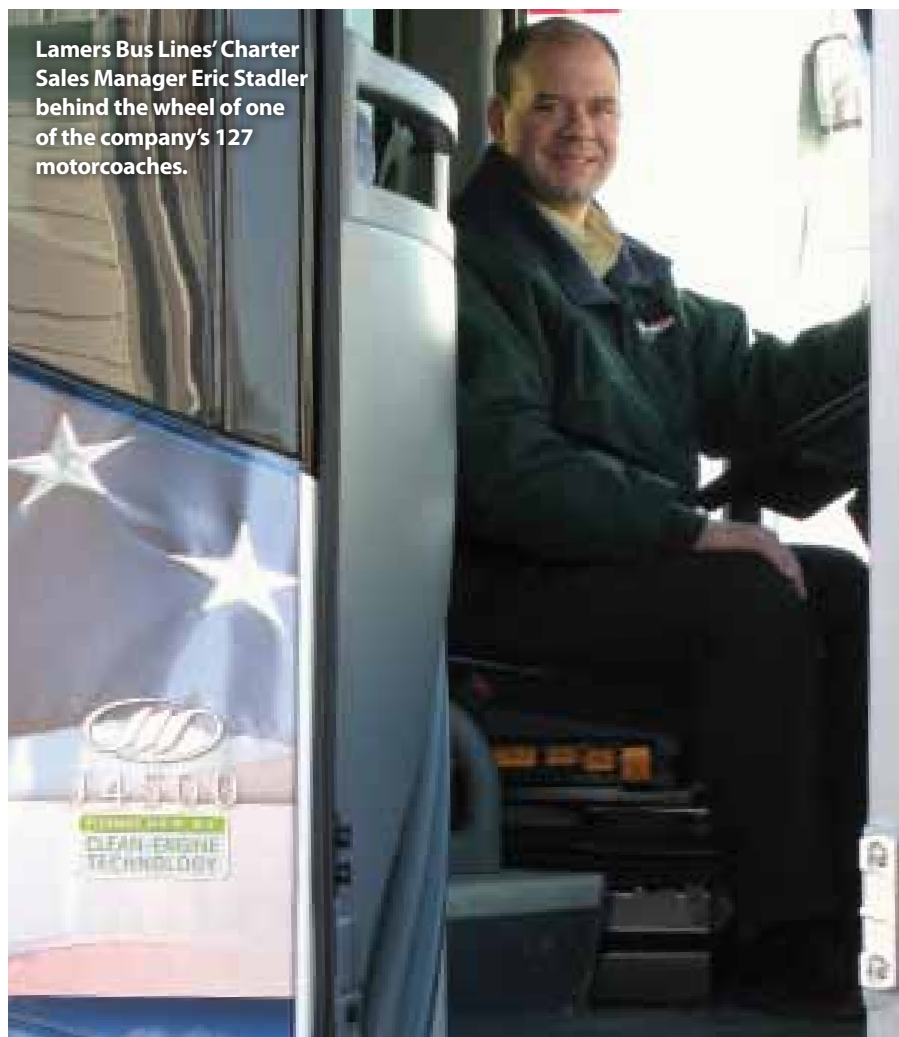
BY ALL ACCOUNTS, EVEN IN the midst of a recession, it's been a very good year for Lamers Bus Lines. The company is building a new corporate headquarters in Green Bay, and earlier this year it sent nearly two dozen motorcoaches to the Winter Olympics in Vancouver. Lamers also was recently named one of the top 20 motorcoach operators in North America.

"We remember where our roots are and who got us to where we are today," says Lamers' Charter Sales Manager Eric Stadler.

The company was launched in 1944 when a 1936 red, white and blue bus drove off founder Lyle Lamers' farm in the Town of Lawrence. The family-owned company is perhaps recognized most for its omnipresent gold school buses, which service 25 school districts in the state. The company now has 1,200 vehicles in its fleet, housed at 24 terminals statewide. The company's 127 motorcoaches are enough to place Lamers at No. 18 on *Metro* magazine's list of Top 50 operators. That's the highest ranking Lamers has received, says Stadler, adding that while the company is proud of its reputation, it's not resting on its axles, so to speak.

"The worst thing that a company can do is take its reputation for granted," Stadler says. "No matter what industry you're in, competition has become so fierce."

According to *Metro* magazine, two thirds of the operators surveyed report that business was down in 2009



Lamers Bus Lines' Charter Sales Manager Eric Stadler behind the wheel of one of the company's 127 motorcoaches.

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compared to 2008. Stadler notes that corporate entertainment travel, in particular, was down. But he adds, "You find a different way to get business."

Servicing major events has always helped shore up Lamers' business. Last year, the company executed the largest move of the Wisconsin National Guard since World War II – with 75 coaches

dedicated to moving 3,500 troops.

"In a tired economy, this work has helped us keep our drivers and staff busy in times that could have normally proven to be down," Stadler says, adding that the second and third quarters of the year are typically the company's slowest.

Earlier this year, Lamers [continued] »

sent 23 coaches, 44 drivers, a manager and a mechanic to Vancouver for the winter games. (The company also sent drivers and coaches to the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta.)

"Sending this amount of staff does diminish our roster a bit. However, selection for this assignment was taken very seriously," Stadler says. "All drivers had to pass stringent security prior to being accepted, to include background checks and other unspecified measures performed by the Canadian authorities."

Later this year, Lamers will gear up for two major events: the National American Legion Convention in Milwaukee and the 92nd PGA Championship in Kohler, both requiring a large contingent of vehicles and staff. Lamers also serviced the PGA Championship in 2004, when the company was hired by The Convention Store, which handles transportation logistics for the event.

Jennifer Williams, account executive for The Convention Store, which has had a decade-long relationship with Lamers, uses the company for Wisconsin-based and out-of-state events.

"They always do an excellent job," says Williams, who adds that Lamers will supply 230 vehicles for the August event. She estimates attendance to hit 9,000 or more.

Prior to that major event, however, by June, Lamers plans to move its motorcoach operations and accounting offices into a new facility, next door to its current offices, not far from Austen Straubel International Airport.

With expansion, Stadler says the company will continue to keep its profile and customer service in the minds of the community and beyond. He can't think of a better place to be located than the heart of the Midwest

– honoring the family values of its now 90-something founder, whose sons now run the company.

"You have to know where you are, and the New North, the Midwest, screams hospitality and family." ①

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