

2005 TLPA Paratransit & Contracting Operator of the Year Sheri L. Watson, Checker Services, Inc., Kansas City, Missouri

The Taxicab, Limousine & Paratransit Association is pleased to announce that Sheri L. Watson, president and general manager of Checker Services, Inc., Kansas City, Mo., has been selected as the TLPA 2005 Paratransit & Contracting Operator of the Year.

TLPA Board of Directors member Jim McLary and TLPA Past President Craig Bates nominated Sheri for this award. In addition, contractors and regulators sent letters in support of Sheri's nomination. The Jackson County Board of Services for the Developmentally Disabled wrote, "From management down and throughout the organization, you know they care about their passengers. The drivers are polite, courteous, on time, assist the passenger when necessary and are very caring individuals."

Mid-America Regional Council (MARC) Special Transportation Coordinator Stewart Nelson wrote, "Over the years, the work of Sheri Watson as an operator and provider of transportation services and a representative of the for-profit private sector has contributed significantly and with meaning to the quality of life of much of the region's population that is transportation disadvantaged."

Sheri grew up in suburban Kansas City. She was introduced to the business world as an early teen by very entrepreneurial parents. Her father was in the printing business and her mother owned several exercise studios. At age 13 and through college, she became very involved with her mother's business, and led sales and management teams at several locations. She has always approached situations with a "what's best for the company" attitude.

After graduating from Central Missouri State University, Sheri joined the Pepsi Corporation, where she was recognized with numerous awards. She joined BatesWay Companies in 1989 as director of administration. BatesWay was very diversified, with taxicab, school and corporate charter operations. Shortly after joining the firm, she



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attended her first TLPA meeting when Chuck and Craig Bates hosted TLPA's Spring Conference. She noted the respect association members had for Craig and his father.

Sheri soon was assigned key liaison duties at the agencies BatesWay contracted with for service. BatesWay grew to the largest ambulatory paratransit contractor in the Kansas City region, with large contracts servicing the Kansas City Area Transit Authority (KCATA) and the Kansas City Missouri School District. In 1991, she was offered an opportunity to invest in what was at the time BatesWay's smallest operation, Checker Services, Inc. Chuck Bates had retired, and Craig Bates chose Sheri to be a new partner in operating the company. During the early 1990s, she became responsible for all areas of the operation, and in 1993 was appointed general manager.

The first contract that Sheri initiated was the city of Independence, Mo.'s senior and disabled service known as "Dial-a-Ride." At the same time, she took charge of another municipally-funded service in North Kansas City. During 1995, Sheri spearheaded a move into another large paratransit service with the Mid America Regional Council (MARC)/Commission on

Aging. The contract involves transporting senior citizens to nutrition sites, delivering meals to homebound persons and special transportation reserved utilizing vehicles with and without lifts.

After eight years as Craig Bates' principal assistant and partner, Sheri purchased the remaining shares of Checker in 1997, making it a 100 percent female-owned Disadvantaged Business Enterprise. She proceeded to bid on a large portion of the KCATA business that BatesWay had established. Local politics came to the forefront in 1999 when an opportunity was offered to "re-regulate" Kansas City's taxicab industry. Sheri worked closely with TLPA colleague Bill George (Yellow Cab), Coach USA and members of the city's hospitality industry to bring back a quality-based industry environment.

Checker Services, Inc., is now the largest female-owned transportation company in the Kansas City region. It operates over 180 vehicles (125 taxis and 56 paratransit vehicles) and is the largest sedan supplier to KCATA, MARC and several school districts. It also operates the largest taxicab fleet at Kansas City International Airport.

Sheri says that what makes her company stand apart from others is: "Positive, ongoing communications with staff and customers. Easy access for our customers and agency administrators to identify and correct problems as they present themselves. Very sensitive to employee needs and relations. Always an honest effort to go 'over and beyond' in fulfilling commitments."

She continues, "Checker's philosophy is 'Safety, Sensitivity and Awareness' with safety first in all situations, with sensitivity to clients' special needs, with an ongoing awareness of what commitment is needed to provide honest reliable service."

Sheri says the paratransit/contracting industry has seen changes since she started working in this area. "The ADA revolution, which provides for more intense efforts to better serve the phys-

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Geoffrey Riesel

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Jonathan works in business development at the London office of CNN.

Geoffrey stated that TLPA has provided immeasurable help to his business. He said, "The network of members has given us a wide knowledge of technology and of systems; it has introduced us to business opportunities. It has opened paths of trade understanding and opened our eyes to many different business issues for example diversification. It has enabled us to network and gain not only wonderful business associates but has also given us a wide circle of the nicest friends anyone could ever have. The TLPA is an extended family of some of the most marvelous people. Long may it continue so! I am completely surprised, but at the same time delighted that we have been conferred this honor, especially when it comes from our very dear American friends at the TLPA. It really is a wonderful and very thoughtful award. I hope we can be worthy of it."

In recognition of exceptional management of an outstanding municipal taxicab service focused on professionalism, customer service and safety, the Taxicab Limousine & Paratransit Association is very proud to honor Geoffrey M. Riesel as the TLPA 2005 Taxicab Large Fleet Operator of the Year. ■

Jo-Anne Thompson

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management and how it benefits her worker and passengers: "The most important thing I do as a business owner is to be accessible to my employees and to my customers. We own our vehicles and our drivers are employees — that automatically makes my company and me directly accountable for the quality of the service we provide. We have our own maintenance and repair facility. Along with the mechanics I regularly spot check vehicles for their condition and cleanliness, we have a driver dress code, we invest in driver training, and I handle most of our complaints myself. Having grown up in and lived in

Framingham most of my life, I take our successes — and failures — very personally. By constantly striving to achieve the best quality of service possible, I can increase our success stories, and minimize our failures!"

Jo-Anne does not have any family members working with her in the business, but says, "My father could not have created this business without the help of his brothers, brother-in-law, and my cousin David Thompson, who was our head mechanic and dispatcher for 25 years, until his death four years ago."

Jo-Anne's reaction to winning this award was to exclaim, "I'm delighted and flattered! It is a great honor to be recognized by my peers in the industry, many of whom have been a great resource and help to me over the years."

In recognition of exceptional management of an outstanding community taxicab service focused on customer service, maintenance and safety, the Taxicab, Limousine & Paratransit Association is very proud to honor Jo-Anne Thompson as the TLPA 2005 Taxicab Small Fleet Operator of the Year. ■

Jacob Salem

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cancer research, epilepsy research, suicide hotlines, and helping troubled youth. First American Limousine is a participant in a prisoner work release and reintegration program. By hiring and training soon-to-be-released prisoners to service, clean and detail its fleet of luxury vehicles. The company is providing them with a marketable skill prior to their return to society.

It seems that someone who is in a 24-hour, 365-days-a-year business would have no time for hobbies, but Jake lists, "Auto racing, sports cars, wine and trying to go fishing whenever I can."

In his letter nominating Jake for this award, Victor Dizengoff wrote, "His somewhat flamboyant and 'in your face' business and political personality is not reflected in his personal life. He is a warm, loving and giving friend who likes to have a lot of fun and good times enjoying his love of the automobile and the ocean. It would be comforting to me

to see him receive the recognition he has long deserved."

In recognition of exceptional management of an outstanding limousine operation and service to the limousine industry and his community, TLPA is very proud to honor Jacob M. "Jake" Salem as the TLPA 2005 Limousine & Sedan Operator of the Year. ■

Sheri Watson

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ically challenged and improve accessibility of service. There is more emphasis on human resources and training techniques, which assure safer and more reliable drivers. The use of technology, which allows for better trip intake, distribution and tracking, is on the increase. The general public having a better awareness of person with disabilities and their use of mobility devices."

Sheri loves the outdoors. "I am always involved with my son Chase and daughter Maddie's activities, including Girl and Boy Scouts, and have followed their sports activities very closely. The family rarely misses a Kansas City Chiefs football game." Sheri and her husband Alan share outdoor activities, such as boating at the Lake of the Ozarks and riding their Harleys.

Sheri says of her award, "It is a proud but humbling feeling to be honored by your peers, many of which you've learned from and looked up to for years and with whom you've enjoyed tremendous fellowship. Fleet owners aren't patted on the back very often back home, so receiving the honor is very gratifying. But, I must say that I look upon this award as recognition of our company's commitment to safety and sensitivity. This award really belongs to the Checker Services team, more than 200 people strong, who treat each passenger with the same care and concern each and every day."

In recognition of exceptional management of an outstanding community paratransit service focused on safety, sensitivity and awareness of participants' needs, TLPA is very proud to honor Sheri L. Watson as the TLPA 2005 Paratransit & Contracting Operator of the Year. ■