

2018 Taxicab Driver of the Year

Anthony Sims of Checker Cab

By Bridget Ann Peery

Anthony Sims, 58, takes pride in living the simple life: going out to dinner, catching a movie and going on walks with his girlfriend, Denise. Originally from Chattanooga, Tennessee, Sims moved to Atlanta, Georgia, with friends to attend DeVry University. He worked briefly as a welder and then as a limousine driver before joining Checker Cab (Atlanta) in 1986.

Sims was immediately drawn to the freedom of being a taxi driver, which allowed him to play basketball in his spare time and take trips out of town. But his favorite part his job has always been getting to know people.

"I know it's cliché, but actually, it's the real truth that you get to meet a lot of different people from different backgrounds," says Sims, who is the recipient of this year's TLPA Taxicab Driver of the Year award. "I love to be out and meet people and do what I like doing."

Because Sims prioritizes customer relationships, he takes great care to ensure every ride has consistent service. This includes keeping a pristine car, dressing properly and meeting the client's needs. Not every person will be the same, Sims explained, emphasizing the importance of being able to read each individual from one ride to the next.

"I appreciate them riding with me because they could ride with anybody," Sims says. And it is all about keeping the right attitude, he says.

"I try to do with the first customer the same thing I do with the last customer. Even when it's not the best day, be a better person and try to work through it."

Communication and safety are equally important parts of Sims' daily work ethic, and are qualities he has tried to impress on each of the more than 75 drivers he has trained in his 33 years at the company. Especially, he says, considering how large the city of Atlanta has become.

"My safety and my customer's safety are the number one thing to me," Sims says, remembering the "Atlanta's Population Now" sign he often passes that displays the bustling city's growing number of inhabitants, around 6 million in recent years.

"I try to treat it as if I was getting in the cab," says Sims. "You have to be very careful. There are so many things that can mess up your whole day."

Checker Cab has invested in innovative technologies to keep both drivers and riders safe, according to Rick Hewatt, president of Checker Cab, which is celebrating its 71st year in business. Starting with one car in 1947, the fleet has grown to about 100 cars today, integrating new technologies along the

way, from two-way radios, to alternative fuels, to electric vehicles. Checker Cab was one of the first companies in the country to deploy mobile data terminals in every vehicle and one of the few companies in the area that has both front- and rear-facing cameras. And Sims has embraced these new changes all along the way.

"Anthony has always been gung-ho about the things we've done. [He's] one of those guys that catches on quick," Hewatt says. "We're very proud of Anthony. He's the kind of

driver you wish you had 200 more people like him. He knows where he's going, he knows what

he's doing... He puts forth such a great image."

Customers cannot call in to request Sims, Hewatt explained, but they do reach out to him outside of the dispatch office. Some clients have been doing so for as long as 12 years—a testament to the quality of service Sims delivers to each client.

"If I have an important pickup and it's imperative that it happens correctly, a lot of times, I'll call Anthony myself," Hewatt says.

To Sims, Checker Cab has become more than just a company, but a family, too. After all of these years, he has never thought about leaving, or driving anywhere else, because of the relationships he has built and the friends he has made. That was evident when he got the news from Hewatt he had won this year's award.

"He said, 'Hey Anthony, what you doing?' I said, 'Nothing, just sitting here,'" Sims recalls from that afternoon. He believed Hewatt was ringing him just to talk, as he sometimes does.

"He said, 'Yeah buddy, you won. I'm so happy for you.' I said, 'You're lying!' He said, 'No, I'm not!' And we were laughing on the phone for about five minutes. ... I couldn't believe I had won," Sims says.



Anthony Sims is the 2018 Taxicab Driver of the Year. He has been driving with Checker Cab for 32 years.