



---

## Moving miners provides windfall for Coach America

June 25, 2012 Rob Sabo, *Northern Nevada Business Weekly*

Coach America provides charter bus and shuttle service to locations across the United States, so why are its operations in remote northern Nevada one of the most viable anywhere in the company?

The answer: Rapidly increasing employment by gold and silver producers, which contract with Coach America to transport workers from Elko, Winnemucca and Ely to far-flung mining sites. In fact, the company's operations in northern Nevada have nearly doubled since 2008.

Ryan Veater, the northern Nevada general manager of Coach America, says the company's operation in Elko has grown in the past four years from a small cadre of supervisors and drivers to 13 supervisors/managers and more than 220 employees.

In 2008, before gold prices began climbing and before mine sites started adding hundreds of staff, Coach America operated 65 busses in the region. Today the company has 125 vehicles and could possibly expand its fleet by another 25 busses by year's end, Veater says.

The company provides some charter bus service for sports teams and high schools in Elko County, as well as transit service in White Pine and Elko counties.

Even so, transportation of mine staff accounts for the bulk of the company's business in Elko County.

Veater estimates that Coach America's northern Nevada drivers transport about 2,500 mine site employees to and from work daily.

"The main reason we are in this community is transportation," Veater says. "The mines have identified risk in fatigue management and overcrowding of roadways. We are a vital contractor to the mines, and we are tasked with ensuring their workforce is kept safe to and from the mine sites every day."

The rapid growth in Elko has caused a great deal of growing pains for management. Like the mining companies it serves, Coach America faces challenges with recruitment and retention of workers. The company headquartered in Dallas casts a wide net in hopes of snaring operators.



It doesn't help recruitment that the skills that make for good bus operators in northern Nevada — a commercial drivers license, good knowledge of federal and state Mine Safety and Health Administration regulations — are the same skills mining companies seek for their fleet of operators.

"It is a beast — we have to go toe-to-toe with the mines that drive this market," Veater says. "We are trying to compete with the mines, but we have a creative recruiting practice, and we rely highly on our HR department to spread the work to candidates coming from the operator ranks.

"We are not hitting the premium pay of the mine sites, but there are a lot of positives that come with working for contractor."

Contract drivers for Coach America typically work a split shift, because mine site personnel work long 10- to 12-hour days.

Competing with lucrative mine site wages is a problem faced by dozens of businesses that provide services to northeastern Nevada mining companies. Coach America's group of mechanics that keep its fleet of busses in top shape and running daily, for instance are highly sought-after diesel engine repair specialists. Its managers — experts in MSHA and Department of Transportation regulations — also have knowledge prized by mining companies that have been hard-pressed to find key personnel during the past few years of expansion.

"Barrick and Newmont are large employers in this community, and we are all going after the same skill sets for the operator force," Veater says. "Maintenance is the same thing."

Salaries are a key tool used in employee retention for the transportation company, Veater says. The company has lured some high-caliber managers to the area to spearhead the company's recruitment and retention efforts. It places openings on all the major online job search sites, and it also targets regions especially impacted by the recession the past four years.

The company routinely pulls new workers from Reno and Las Vegas, as well as Idaho, Utah, Oregon and Washington.

Due to the rapid growth, and the possibility of even more new mines and expansions in the region in coming years, Coach America and big northeastern Nevada mining companies such as Barrick and Newmont have formed partnerships to address any potential transportation issues early in the planning process, Veater says.

"We have a tremendous amount of business on table, and we have become partners with our customers," he says. "We have recognized the importance, and we support



each other's initiatives. We are fortunate to understand the investments our customers are putting out there exploring or making acquisitions. We know what is coming up and we are part of those planning stages with them."

#### Safety training extensive for Coach America's Elko bus operators

So what's it take to drive a bus full of gold miners to and from work each day? Lots.

Coach America puts all of its drivers through a rigorous eight- to 12-week training course that can convert a greenhorn into an experienced commercial driver. Operators are grilled on the following subjects:

- Mine site hazards
- DOT and MSHA regulations
- Federal transportation laws
- Individual responsibility
- Equipment specifications and operation

If there are safety violations, operators of motor coaches can be cited along with the company, says Coach America General Manager Ryan Veater. Drivers, therefore, have a personal stake to ensure the safety of their equipment and passengers.

Other training is site specific. Drivers also are trained to deal with driving in low light and inclement weather conditions — both of which regularly come into play in northeastern Nevada.

"Safety is paramount," Veater says. "Safe operations for Elko are extremely vital."