

# PRESENTING THE INAUGURAL CLASS of the Chauffeur Driven HALL OF FAME

Chauffeured ground transportation is a storied industry, one that has evolved over a century but remains at its core about safety and excellent customer service. We have many people to thank for laying the sturdy foundation upon which our industry stands, but also for what it has become and what the future holds. The battles have been tough; the victories have been sweet.

We celebrate six individuals who not only leant their grit and hard work when building their own companies, but helped to shape luxury ground transportation at large while also acting as mentors and leaders for their peers. These trailblazers were honored in October at the CD/NLA Show in Boston. We are proud to present the inaugural class of the Chauffeur Driven Hall of Fame.



## Sam Amato

President of Gateway Global  
San Francisco, Calif.

Four decades ago, Sam Amato's decision to moonlight as a part-time chauffeur for his father-in-law led to a fateful decision that altered his career path forever. Sam loved being a chauffeur, and his affable personality and passion for his hometown of San Francisco made him an ideal tour guide for his passengers. A year later, he was a full-time owner.

Sam found his initial niche with hotel contracts, which exposed him to high-end corporate executives and eventually led to group work for meetings and events—one of his fastest growing segments today. Sam has inspired the next generation of Amatos to step into the industry as he is now joined by his son Joel and daughter Gina. Thanks to the relationships he has nurtured throughout the Bay Area and beyond, they've been able to take away any home-court advantage of "the apps."



Kaye Marsellies of Grech Motors has been a family friend of the Amatos and Sam's former right-hand man Rich Azzolino since the early '90s. "How many clients do you have who know your entire family? He took me under his wing, and we helped each other. Years ago, we introduced a new fifth door with yellow suede interior and after giving Sam a first look, the unit was his. Just a few years ago, Sam wanted to give Mr. Grech his first fifth door back as a thank-you for always being there—what a celebration! We took that fifth door out on the



town one last time before he handed it over to Mr. Grech. Thank you, Sam, for the great memories, and I look forward to many more with your family." "My friendship with Sam spans more than 25 years," says Ralph Dun-

can of London Towncars. "He was our San Francisco affiliate when I worked for a large international company, and we became instant friends. A few years back, he invited me to spend a week with him and his staff—



what a great week. Sam is a very generous person in a lot of ways, and he is very consistent in this industry, one of the leaders. I have watched how his company has grown, and it is a pleasure to see his son Joel taking on more responsibility. I continue to be honored to call Sam my friend."

Sam has also parlayed his dedication to the industry as a longtime board member of The Transportation Alliance, and was even honored as the association's Limousine & Sedan Operator of the Year in 2007. "When our association needs expert guidance on premium or charter services, I reach out to Sam Amato," says Al LaGasse of The Transportation Alliance. "He is widely respected, very knowledgeable, honest, and a mentor to so many. He has generously volunteered his time and expertise by serving as a co-chair of our Limousine Division, on our board of directors, and currently as a board



# Barbara Chirico

Chairman of Gem Limousine  
Woodbridge, N.J.

When asked to define what sets Barbara Chirico of Gem Limousine apart from other people, longtime business associate Bruce Cirlin of Complete Fleet Livery Sales doesn't hesitate for a second: "There is just something special about Barbara, and there always has been. You

can see it when you meet her and talk to her for the first time."

Barbara founded Gem Limousine out of her family's New Jersey home in 1976, a time when there were few women executives and even fewer in the luxury ground transportation industry. But, through her ambition, keen business acumen, and the special way she impresses everyone she meets, Barbara gained the respect of her peers and clients along the way.

"She is truly a self-made businessperson," says Cirlin. "I sold Gem their first stretch back in 1984 or so. She was running the company out of her kitchen with her little girl Deanna at her side.

I've always been impressed with the ways she's done business, and seeing her grow to the point that she was the president of the NLA has been incredible."



as she has welcomed her daughter and son-in-law Deanna and Joe Gulino, as well as her adult grandchildren, into the business. Granddaughter Nicole Stankewicz serves as Gem's director of finance, and her husband Kevin is vice president, client relations and sales. Meanwhile, grandson Joe Gulino Jr. is Gem's director, strategic part-



nerships, while his wife Lauren is director, global business development.

"We have always felt truly blessed to call a person like her 'grandma.' Now, working as the third generation within a corporation she built with her blood, sweat, and tears, we really see firsthand how special she is to every person she has crossed paths with. When she received the CD Hall of Fame Award, she focused on the message 'just be kind,' and that is the exact motto she lives by every single day," says Joe and Lauren Gulino.

"She has truly made such a powerful impact in our company, community, and industry, and has done everything in a way that always considered the feelings and well-being of others. Her warmth radiates in everything she does. She's taught us valuable things like how to work hard and how to make smart business decisions, but most importantly she influences us to be kind. And that's the best type of influence we could ever ask for," adds Kevin and Nicole Stankewicz. — SR

member and on our Executive Committee. Sam speaks softly, but when he speaks everyone listens."

"Sam always says: 'Imagine being part of a circle of friends and family, an organization, a group of people where everyone intentionally focused on adding value to others. Wouldn't that be a wonderful place to be?' He encourages others to add value to people. Thank you for being you, my friend," says Reza Choudhury of Reliance Group/HYRYDE.

Matt Assolin of Nikko's Worldwide Chauffeured Services agrees: "Sam Amato is one of the guys you want to be around in this business. His wisdom and passion for our industry is on the next level. I'm lucky to count him as one of my mentors, but even luckier to call him my friend."

Of course, Sam is known to share more than just his advice, experience, and advocacy; as a lover of wine and fine cuisine, his parties are legendary. "Sam is one of the most gregarious and generous people I know, and his trademark wine parties at industry events epitomize his bend towards hospitality," says Mike Fogarty of the Addison Lee Group/Tristar Worldwide U.S. "I feel fortunate to count Sam as a colleague, more importantly as a friend, and I believe he was an outstanding candidate for the inaugural class for the Hall of Fame. Congratulations on this well-deserved honor!" — SR



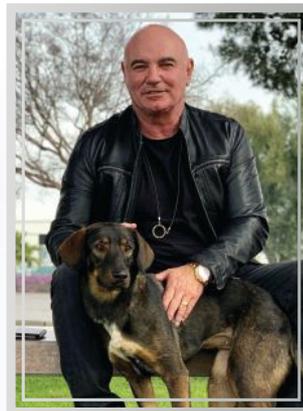
# Ed Grech

CEO of Grech Motors  
Riverside, Calif.

*In* an industry where faces come and go, the stalwart mainstays' permanence and visibility stand as quiet testaments to their tenacity, adaptability, and staying power.

Ed Grech of Grech Motors is one of those legends who weathered every storm only to come back stronger than ever.

Ed founded Krystal Enterprise in 1983 and quickly proved to be a bona fide visionary by delivering safe and breathtakingly innovative stretch limousines; as the industry changed, Ed and the company that now bears his name adapted his vision to overhaul buses into streamlined pinnacles of luxury—right in time for the industry to switch from cautiously approaching big people-movers to openly embracing buses and motorcoaches as ways

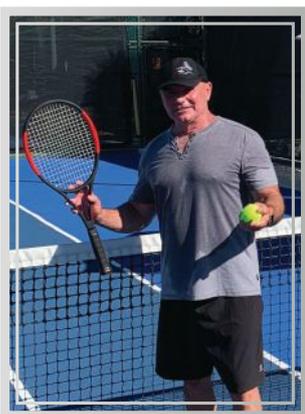


to TNC-proof their business models. Needless to say, the varied offerings of Grech Motors—plus the company's relationship-first philosophy of doing business—remain huge hits with operators and their clientele alike.

"I wanted to make a real impact in my market, and Grech Motors was the company I wanted to partner with. I bought my first GM40 with all the bells and whistles, and that's where my relationship with Grech began," says Jorge Sanchez of Hermes Worldwide. "When I was introduced to Ed, I had already heard nothing but good things about him from industry friends."

Grech's ability to leverage his success to give back to the industry as a staunch supporter of industry initiatives, events, and operators hasn't gone unnoticed, either.

His eponymous company is familiar to any frequent attendee of industry events, including those catering to vertical markets, not only for their impressive, trend-setting buses but also for the "Grech Motors" signage indicating the generous lengths to which its figurehead and his team are willing to go to step up as headlining sponsors.



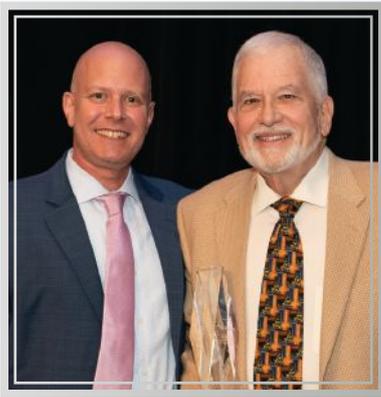
"When we first started getting into the larger equipment, I saw the Grech name everywhere," Sanchez adds. "They always made a big splash at the shows. They are always front and center, and they are a huge supporter of the industry."

NLA President Gary Buffo of Pure Luxury Transportation not only is a loyal large-volume customer of Grech Motors but also appreciates the integrity and ingenuity that Ed himself has been an unwavering example of throughout the decades. Buffo is quick to cite how Ed stands behind every



bus that leaves his factory—and goes the extra mile to nurture personal relationships. He recalls how Ed personally flew in and meet the Pure Luxury team, and how freely they were able to discuss Buffo's concerns when he first starting "going Grech," right on down to being receptive to Buffo's suggestions on what a bus platform should look, feel, and ride like.

"Ed Grech has been a pioneer and pillar in this industry in more ways than one," Buffo affirms. "He always has been innovative and passionate about the direction of Grech Motors, and his support and generosity to the NLA and its members is unfounded. Ed has shown his dedication to the industry time and time again and he was a clear choice to be included in the inaugural Hall of Fame Class. I congratulate him on this well-deserved recognition." — MM



# George Jacobs

CEO of Windy City Limousine & Bus Chicago, Ill.

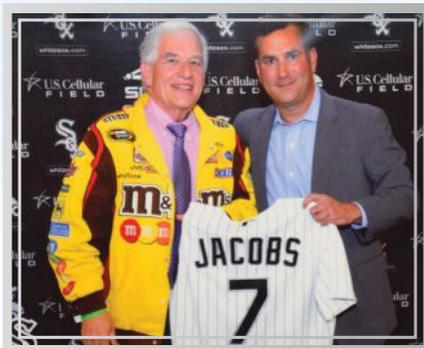
George Jacobs' story is well-known throughout the industry: When he was at rock-bottom, the ground transportation industry gave him a purpose, a reason, and a second chance.

"The limousine industry was my calling. I quite gambling in 1974; five years later, I had saved up enough money to buy my first car," he recalled in an interview for Windy City's cover story in Chauffeur Driven's November 2015 issue. "I was totally bankrupt in 1974: mentally, physically, morally, emotionally, and financially.

Being a compulsive gambler, I craved action. And there's no more action than being in the limousine industry. So I think this was a good, healthy substitute for gambling."

A tireless advocate for the Gambler's Anonymous program that he credits as being the other half of the equation that saved his life, George paid his good fortune forward: "I wanted to employ people who also needed a second chance, and I did. I employed lots of people from Gambler's Anonymous, for instance, and gave them a chance. There are some people who work for me today who have been with me for 25 years."

But George's well-known story of redemption is eclipsed only by his generosity, which is something of an industry legend unto itself. Countless people have introduced him as a mentor, a supporter, a friend, and the kind of guy who'll waste



no time coming to others' assistance, whether it's with his advice, insight, time, or helping hand.

"For all the years that I have known George, he has always said and lives by, 'For every operator who improves their business and becomes successful, our entire industry benefits,'" says Windy City's Executive Vice President Tracy Raimer, who joined forces with the Chicago mainstay in 2017.

It's also worth mentioning that George built not one but two successful operations that have dominated the Chicago market. In 1984, he purchased American Limousine; 14 years later, he sold it to Carey International in one of the industry's big-

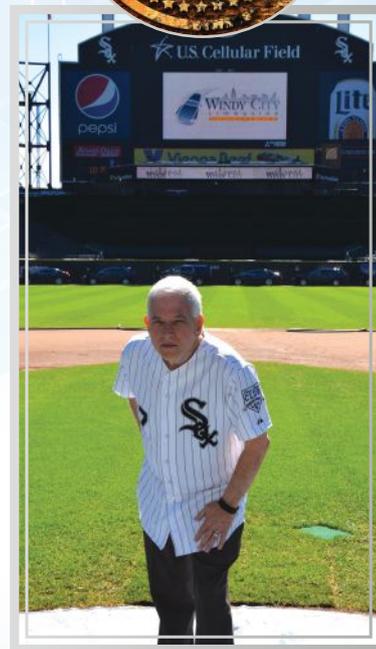


gest deals. He worked for the network for several years and even had a brief fling with retirement before the bug bit him again, and Windy City Limousine & Bus was born. It's hard to argue with that winning streak.

On October 15, the same industry that served as Jacobs' life raft was on its feet and wildly applauding his induction into the inaugural Hall of Fame class. The steady stream of well-wishers that dogged him well into the evening with congratulations, handshakes, and hugs is a testament to how many lives and companies the industry icon has positively impacted during his four decades of infusing the industry with a stronger sense of professionalism, leading the charge of embracing buses as fleet mainstays, and serving as a trustworthy leader in his company, his market, and even as NLA president.



"I first met George in December 2013 at a Spinning Wheels group. I'd only been in the industry for a few years, my company was growing out of control, and I was working 80+ hours a weeks trying to keep up. I felt desperate and I was hitting the burnout wall," says Paul Thompson of Santa Fe Valet/Accent New Mexico. "Something in George's talk that day spoke to me, so I approached him during a break, thanked him for his wisdom, and shared my current struggle. George did not hesitate in giving me his full attention and opening up to me.



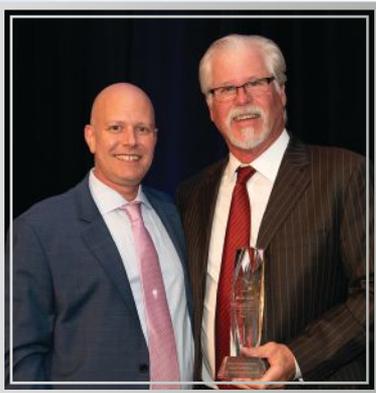
He shared several stories that freakishly mirrored mine, about seemingly insurmountable obstacles and challenges, and how he got through them. I can say without any doubt, that conversation changed things for me."

The industry trade shows are always proof that George goes above and beyond to pass along the wisdom his decades of industry experience have offered, as he's been a regular presence at CD's annual Operator Mentoring Program.

"George was my mentor last year, at the suggestion of my dad [Cliff Wright]," says Joey Wright of Royal Transportation Group. "I learned so much from his mentoring session that I requested him again this year, and we had another great session filled with his advice and encouragement."

More recently, with informal industry events popping up to bring industry niches closer together, the annual Ladies' Retreat has found a steadfast supporter in Jacobs.

"George Jacobs was the first one to step up and ask what he could do to sponsor the Bake-a-Thon," says Mary Johnson of Alliance Limousine of NY. "I said that I have a huge need for baking stuff but it's a high-dollar sponsorship—and he said 'I'm in' without hesitating. He's always ready to help, and I appreciate his support." — MM



# Dawson Rutter

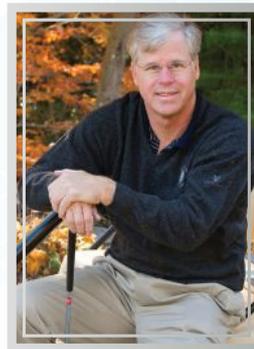
CEO of Commonwealth Worldwide  
Boston, Mass. and New York, N.Y.

When people speak about Dawson Rutter, it's more than likely that the word "generosity" will come up frequently. Colleagues, peers, and friends often mention Dawson's willingness to share his time and insight—no matter how frank—to help operators and the industry as a whole.

During his time in chauffeured ground transportation, it's fair to say that Dawson has experienced it all. From his humble beginnings as a college student behind the wheel of a cab

to building his business by catering to ultra-high-end clientele in his current role of CEO of Commonwealth Worldwide, Dawson has gleaned a lifetime of knowledge, making him one of the pre-eminent thought leaders in the industry. But, despite running a prestigious company in two of East Coast's largest markets, while deftly navigating the politics impacting his business in those cities, he is always willing—if not, eager—to offer advice or guidance to help his fellow operators' businesses grow and thrive.

"Dawson Rutter is a true pioneer in the ground transportation business," says Don Mahnke of ABC Worldwide Transportation. "He has shared his knowledge and generosity on a personal and professional level that has certainly propelled ABC and me on a journey that puts us in another stratosphere. Dawson is a true leader and professional on all levels, and never hesitates to be a friend or share his business knowledge at any time."



Longtime friend Brett Barenholtz of Above All Transportation/Boston Car has a relationship with Dawson that spans more than 40 years.

"The guy means the world to me. I've known him since I was 12 or 13, when he used to drive a cab for my dad's company. When I transitioned from the cab industry to the limo business, I put six cars on the road, and I went to Dawson and asked, 'Now what?' He helped me find my way with all aspects of the business, and he has been a true mentor



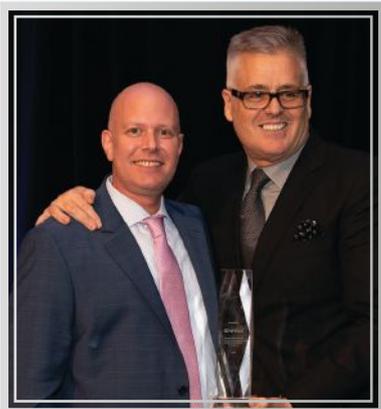
for me. We still have lunch together about once a month."

Dawson's generosity transcends the one-on-one time he offers to industry peers; he also has used his vast experience to better the industry through his work with the National Limousine Association. During his time as an NLA board member and first vice president, he was largely instrumental in helping to grow the NLA's PAC Fund, which continues to be used to wrestle the industry's toughest issues. Furthermore, he is extremely active in supporting charitable causes in and out of the industry. Each year at the Chauffeur Driven event, Dawson and his significant other Tami Saccoccio donate a "Weekend with Dawson & Tami," which offers a high-bidder a few days of mentoring and fun with the couple. It is a perennial high-ticket money-raiser.



"What Dawson has done for the industry is incredible," says Barenholtz. "People like him make chauffeured transportation great because they share and help with their knowledge. Even working in the same market, he never makes you feel like you're competing—you end up feeling like you're working together. He's an icon, and I'm incredibly fortunate to call him a friend." — RS





# David Seelinger

Chairman & CEO of EmpireCLS Worldwide  
Secaucus, N.J. and El Segundo, Calif.



**A**lan Lehrer, the founder of Empire International, was among the first in the industry to recognize the gem he had hired as a chauffeur. The young man, David Seelinger, was impressive and had an entrepreneurial drive, so the relationship easily moved from boss and employee to mentor and mentee. Before long, they were business partners, building what started as a three-car company into one with hundreds. Of course, today that number is significantly higher as EmpireCLS—among the industry’s largest—is a global operation.

David has taken the company from being a local New Jersey company to a highly respected service known beyond the U.S., in part to honor the memory of Lehrer, who was mortally injured in a motorcycle accident in 1990. In 2005, he merged with CLS to form EmpireCLS, which, at the time, was among the biggest industry mergers. More recently, he’s been an outspoken advocate for the industry and its place in the larger business travel sector, and he’s passionate about adopting technology.

David has never been afraid to fight for his industry: He was one of the founding members of Advocacy for Fairness in Transportation, which was created to stem the tide of TNCs, and has been a longtime director for the Limousine Association of New Jersey. He’s freely given his time and advice to his fellow operators, speaking at and serving as a mentor for many CD shows. He even appeared on the TV show *Undercover Boss* in 2015, an experience that helped him to better connect with his employees.



Always a champion of his loyal team, David has been open about overcoming his personal obstacles and grateful for his own second chance. But most of all, he’s been a generous leader for his staff, many of whom have stayed and grown with the company like he did.

“It’s been an honor and privilege to work for David Seelinger for the last 21 years,” says Director of IT Jaime Major. “The opportunities David afforded early in my career at EmpireCLS have led to my interests in software and technology, and I’ve been able to develop innovative technological solution for the company for the past 15 years. I could not ask for a better team of people to work with each day.”

Major also tells of the time when she met her all-time favorite band, the Dave Matthews Band, on the way back from a meeting and a trip on a private plane. David was on hand to take an amazing photo after landing at Teterboro Airport. “[Dave Matthews Band Violinist] Boyd Tinsley was honestly the nicest guy: He came over to talk, gave me a big hug, and thanked me for being a longtime fan. Then we took this picture together, which was taken by David who was so excited for me. It was a great day all around.”

“I personally have worked for David for 22 years,” says EVP of Sales Marissa Craris. “I came on board at 17 during a high school work program and thought it was like any other hourly job. The company was so much smaller at the time and had daily involvement with David. Regardless of our position, he always allows us to have a voice and



cares about the employees. He continues to encourage us to share different ideas we have on how to make our clients’ experiences better. EmpireCLS is my home because of David: He is like family and his door is always open. As a CEO, I have seen him lead our company to greatness, but also have seen him roll up his sleeves and clean cars, drive cars, and jump in any way needed. He has a huge heart and really tries to help his team. We had a young employee who suffered a stroke and David immediately reached out to his family and asked how he could help. David made sure he received full compensation so his family didn’t have to worry—all while not knowing if the employee would be able to return to work. He is an inspiring CEO who always challenges us to do better.”

David Seelinger may have literally built an empire and a family at work, but he’s just dad at home to his beloved teen daughters Dakota and Madison. — SR

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