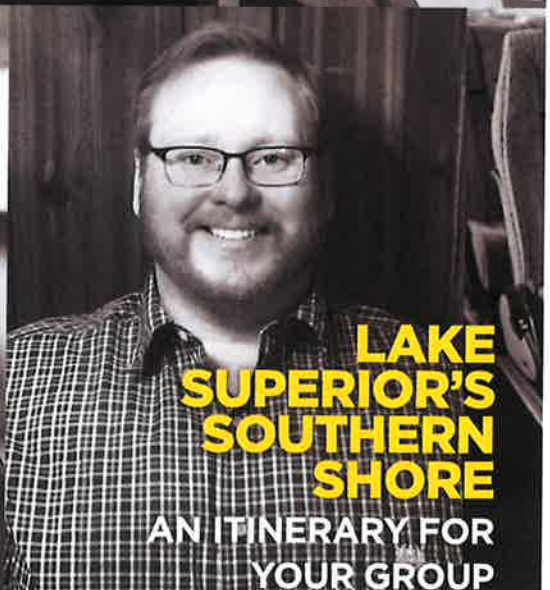


# Destinations

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2019

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# GETTING IT DONE

*Up-and-coming leaders in the motorcoach travel and tourism industry*

BY LESLIE GOLDMAN

Every year, thousands of motorcoach and tour operators, exhibitors, and suppliers gather for the ABA Marketplace, excited to learn, network, explore new ideas, and gather with old friends. Innovation is surely at the forefront of everyone's minds: You want fresh ideas for incremental business and new sales channels, creative problem-solving strategies, ideas for tapping into the power of technology and social media, and so much more. As you make your way through the action-packed event, be sure to keep an eye out for the following seven stars, each

of them up-and-comers in the motorcoach travel and tourism industry.

"ABA is excited to see a new wave of leaders coming into the industry," says ABA President & CEO Peter Pantuso. "Their insights, problem-solving skills, fresh ways of thinking and bringing concepts and ideas forward is refreshing, as they represent the way their new customers view the world." While these seven are just a sampling of an enormous, impressive pool of talent, "they're paving the way for the next generations of motorcoach tour and travel leaders."





## MOTORCOACH OPERATOR



**Alex Berardi**, director of business development & marketing, Trailways of New York, Hurley, N.Y.  
Age: 32

Alex Berardi may be the most fashionable face in the motorcoach industry. In 2010, he became the youngest designer to show at the tents at New York Fashion Week, and the *Washington Post* called him a prodigy. Two years later, during a disappointing fundraising round for his eponymous fashion line, he decided to dip one Chuck Taylor-clad toe into the family business—his great-grandfather, John Van Gonsic Sr., was one of Trailways of New York's earliest founding members—and never looked back.

"Pretty soon, I was two feet in and head over heels with the opportunities and community I'm now lucky enough to work with," says the fourth-generation employee, who has risen from part-time ticketing agent to director of business development and marketing. Berardi says he enjoys collaborating with "an ecosystem of bright minds both young and old" to inject the company with modern business practices, "marrying the best of yesterday with the sharpest of today's methods."

A few examples:

**Incremental business:** "For a customer base that's more tech-friendly than ever before, we've brought video advertising to our onboard Wi-Fi product. Compelling video shorts enhance passengers' experience while bringing incremental revenues to the table. In that same vein, we've partnered with major advertising firms to land upscale clients such as Nordstrom and MasterCard, featuring them in our vehicle wraps. At first, this was a tough sell internally, as we'd been focused for so long on getting people on board our buses, not what people see on the

## "ABA is excited to see a new wave of leaders coming into the industry."

—PETER PANTUSO, PRESIDENT & CEO, ABA

outside of those buses. But this, too, has proven to be a rich source of incremental revenue. And it's exciting to work with other modern brands; it brings more relevancy to our customers as they board the vehicles."

**New sales channels:** "When I first learned about Wanderu in 2013, I immediately emailed the founders. Several weeks later, we were one of the first interline carriers to launch on its platform, bringing a younger, more modern customer to our business.

"And with tour and travel becoming increasingly tough sells at our company, our team started brainstorming ways to woo young consumers who didn't seem to be looking to bus companies for adventure packages," Berardi says. "I reached out to New York's Sourced Adventures, an online tour and travel team that was the brainchild of Groupon and LivingSocial, and said, 'Hey, you have great tour packages. We offer seamless transportation. Want to work together?' Our tour sales are now on the rise."

**Partnerships between industries:** "This is what keeps me awake at night right now—in a good way! By working together, ABA's motorcoach, travel and tourism industries have the power to create more business for each other and for our communities at large. Take the Louisville Convention & Visitors Bureau, for example: In only three years, Vice President of Tourism Development Nicole Twigg and the team have reinvented an already action-packed city. New restaurants, pop-up experiences, and revamped stalwarts such as Churchill Downs and the new Kentucky International Convention Center make Louisville an easy sell to

our travel customers. It's a win-win for every industry player!"



Luke Busskohl

**Luke and Alex Busskohl**, chief operating officer and corporate operations and marketing specialist, Arrow Stage Lines, Omaha, Neb.  
Ages: 37 and 23



Alex Busskohl

With elder brother Luke at the helm, Arrow Stage Lines has launched two successful new brands—Arrow Nationwide Ground Logistics and Arrow Entertainer

(entertainment touring.) He's also the visionary behind Arrow Connect, a fully loaded package of on-board Wi-Fi and outlet access offering passengers Bluetooth, HDMI, iPod/iPhone/smartphone connections, and more. With operational oversight spanning 12 locations and 600-plus employees nationwide, Luke manages fleet allocation including new vehicle orders, product design, and facility upgrades. Arrow Stage Lines is currently on the shortlist of 16 carriers nationwide to earn the Trax President's Circle Risk Control and Safety Award in two consecutive years. In an effort to give back, Arrow teamed with Charity: Water to donate funds from every charter booked to clean water efforts in Uganda.

Younger brother Alex started out as a bus cleaner seven years ago, climbing his way up to corporate operations and marketing specialist. In that role, he has helped create a digital culture that's surely far beyond the wildest dreams of great-grandfather Carl Busskohl, who started the company in 1928, hauling mail in his Buick.

"We live in a world where everyone wants what they want right now, and if we can't answer their questions, they'll go somewhere else to find it," says Alex.

“So we’ve created a website that has a purpose with every page, features effortless ways to communicate such as a live, online chat option, and offers a quoting platform designed to push results.” Alex oversees the company’s social media presence, too, optimizing platforms including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram in ways that engage customers, bring ROI to the brand, and scream “fun,” such as action-packed photos of the Arrow Stage Lines motorcoach that appeared in *Fast & Furious 7*. (The trailer will leave you breathless!)

CVB/DESTINATION



**Roxanne (Roxy) Ward**, tourism & group sales manager, National Geographic Encounter: Ocean Odyssey, Times Square, New York, N.Y.  
**Age:** 30

Growing up in New York City, Roxy Ward’s parents loved taking her to visit iconic sites and museums such as the Statue of Liberty, the Empire State Building, and Madame Tussauds wax museum. (Mel B from

the Spice Girls was her favorite.) At age 23, she returned to the Times Square attraction once again, this time as lead door host, where her friendly smile and love of language (she knows several greetings and salutations in six languages) helped her shatter projected visitor goals. That success led to a series of promotions and, ultimately, an offer to serve as trade sales manager at Ripley’s Believe It or Not, where her team helped triple revenue and visitors from prior years, giving a new identity to the 100-year-old brand.

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Today, Ward makes waves as tourism and group sales manager for National Geographic Encounter: Ocean Odyssey, an “immersive” digital underwater entertainment experience in Times Square.

“Having the chance to create the foundation and legacy for this new experience has been incredibly fulfilling,” she says. Guestwise, “we’re providing a lifetime of memories during their NYC journey, while challenging them to do a better job of protecting our oceans and environment.” (One example: Offering bamboo “strawalternatives” instead of plastic straws to tour and travel partners.)

Workwise, “being able to identify problems that arise universally across the industry—group bookings, best ticketing practices, logistics—and having a variety of solutions and new ways to approach how we deal with group/FIT business has helped me in my new role in a new attraction,” Ward says.

She’s thankful to live and work in one of the world’s top tourist destinations. “There is ample competition, but still a sense of community,” Ward says. “We all want visitors to have unforgettable experiences and keep coming back. With new venues always popping up, it keeps us on our toes to stay informed and innovative in our products and messaging.”



**Lynsey Smith,** travel marketing professional, director of sales, Visit Natchez, Natchez, Miss.

**Age:** 33

The small Mississippi River town of Natchez, Miss., has been good to Lynsey Smith. When she first moved there seven years ago, she joined the downtown development association in an effort to get involved with the community. There, she met someone in the local tourism industry who thought Smith—with her go-getter attitude, previous sales experience, and innate leadership qualities—would be a perfect fit for the director of sales position at Visit Natchez.

Not only did Smith nab the job, but she also says she found her “calling in the tourism industry, spreading the good news of Natchez all over the globe.” In charge of meetings and conventions, motorcoach, SMERF (social, military, educational, religious, and fraternal groups), and international markets, she’s dedicated to streamlining scheduling and payment processes, and thrives on serving as the local go-to contact for visitors, including baby boomer and millennial adventurers, international visitors, and more who are eager to experience the majestic river, abundance of good food and drink, blues music, regional artists, and hospitality of this hidden gem in the Deep South.

With her company’s support, Smith has juggled work and continuing education, recently completing a three-year program at Southeast Tourism Society’s Marketing College and currently enrolled in ABA’s Certified Travel Industry Specialist program. Whether it’s promoting a major event, such as the river city’s tricentennial celebration in 2016, or running with residents through the annual Color Natchez 5K (goal: get covered head to toe in vibrant paint as you run), Smith lives for authentic experiences and wants everybody to join her for the fun.

**TOUR OPERATOR**



**Casey Cole,** sales manager, Super Holiday Tours, Orlando, Fla.

**Age:** 28

Having a father who is president of a student tour and travel company means crisscrossing the country from a young age, watching and absorbing all the unique sights, sounds, and experiences. Now working alongside his dad, Casey Cole is dedicated to broadening other young adults’ horizons in a similar way, mapping out senior class trips to the Lincoln Memorial, sending school marching bands to the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade, and

**“Relatable relationships, and how those relationships correlate, are key to defining market segments and growing businesses.”**

**—CASEY COLE, SALES MANAGER, SUPER HOLIDAY TOURS**

transporting student groups to nearly two dozen international locations for an epic overseas adventure.

Cole is dedicated to challenging colleagues and key industry players to continually reevaluate how they conduct business. “The hospitality industry is growing at an exponential rate, but the world is getting smaller and smaller with each passing year, leaving new and emerging markets competing for travelers to spend their time and money,” he says. “We need to keep educating ourselves about new applications for technology and data, like integrating a proper customer relationship management system that not only oversees company information, but also identifies trends to help leverage opportunities.”

Another hope for the future? “We need more emphasis on the collaboration of information, specifically between hospitality associations and convention and visitor bureaus. Relatable relationships, and how those relationships correlate, are key to defining market segments and growing businesses.”



**Sean Carr,** vice president, Carr’s Holidays Tours, Vestal, N.Y.

**Age:** 28

Sean Carr joined the family business full time straight out of college. His first task: expanding the company. “We had survived on word-of-mouth for more than 25 years, slowly growing through references from previous clients,” he says. “I thought we could grow faster.”

Carr started experimenting with marketing strategies. Surprisingly, social media failed. “I think it was due to the fact that we deal with preformed groups, not retail. It’s easy to market on social media based on demographics and interests, but it still isn’t as effective with business-to-business or, in our case, business-to-school marketing.”

So Carr decided to go old-school, sending out mailers, cold-calling, and emailing specific individuals. It worked: In the subsequent seven years, Carr’s Holidays has doubled its annual sales.

Having grown up in a generation immersed in technology, Carr has also helped usher the company into the 21st century, building a website (none existed previously), initiating automated reminder emails for customers, creating a cloud-based file-sharing system, and installing call forwarding that sends calls to the office directly to employees’ cell phones so nobody misses a thing when they’re on the road. These modern adjustments “have slashed the time we need to spend per group in half, allowing us to take on more clients without lengthening our work day.”

His advice for other young professionals? “Lots of experienced and knowledgeable people are heading into retirement. While this means plenty of exciting opportunities for the younger generation, it also means the tricks of the trade and valuable lessons on how to handle different issues are retiring with these seasoned folks. Tap into the expertise of these individuals who have paved the way. There are just some things that can’t be Googled.” **D**

*Leslie Goldman is a Chicago-based writer.*

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