

2018 Paratransit & Contracting Operator of the Year

Frank Ciccarella

By Bridget Ann Peery

Frank Ciccarella's impact has been felt across America. In his long career, he has moved numerous times, crisscrossing the United States from east to west coasts, with stints in New York, California, Ohio, Kansas, Missouri and Illinois. Most recently, Ciccarella was with SCR Medical Transportation, based in Chicago, Illinois.

Throughout his travels, Ciccarella, the recipient of the 2018 TLPA Paratransit & Contracting Operator of the Year award, has always been one thing first: a teacher.

"I couldn't begin to think how many classes I've taught after 39-plus years in the business. It's probably in the thousands. There wasn't a lot of down time," Ciccarella says with a laugh. "This award is really exciting for me. I take a lot of pride in what I do."

Ciccarella started his career in transportation in 1979 with Cottrell Bus Service in Buffalo, New York, working dispatch. He wrote the then president of the company to be considered for a position in the school bus business, where his father had been an executive vice president before he passed away only months earlier. Ciccarella wanted to follow in his father's footsteps. Even years later, Ciccarella remembers having "one of the toughest bosses in the business" at that first job.

"He made me learn the different pieces of the business," Ciccarella says. "At the time, I thought that I wouldn't get through it. But looking back today, I thank him for the learning experience that gave me my foundation."

So began a decades-long career that has exposed him to numerous experiences in transportation, including school buses, paratransit and fixed route, with leadership roles in the industry in operations, human resources, maintenance, safety, training and brokerage services.

One of his most impactful experiences came with Laidlaw Transit, which sent Ciccarella to the New York State Education Department to design and implement courses for bus driver instructors.

"We developed programs that teach instructors how to teach properly, by engaging with the student drivers, and making sure

not only that teaching takes place, but learning as well using media and preparation," Ciccarella says. "This process still holds true today."

Over the years, Laidlaw sent Ciccarella, along with his family, to different parts of the country. But his commitment to developing an effective training and safety program never ended and, eventually, paid off. In 2007, Laidlaw received the Gold Award for Bus Safety from the American Public Transit Association (APTA) for contractors.



Frank Ciccarella is the 2018 Paratransit & Contracting Operator of the Year. He has been in the transportation industry for nearly 40 years.

"That was a pretty important milestone for me," Ciccarella says. "To reach the goal of being recognized by our peers, the APTA award was really something special for myself and the crew that I worked with, and for our company, Laidlaw Transit. We were constantly tweaking it and making sure the program fit the needs."

That approach also carried over to SCR Medical Transportation, where it is all about making sure trainers and drivers understand the company's culture, he says. A family-run company, SCR provides nonemergency medical transport with around 500 vehicles and 1,200 employees. It has several contracts with PACE Suburban Bus and Chicago Public Schools, as well as with Veterans Administration hospitals and several shuttle contracts.

"It's all about the people who ride our vehicles and their safety. The people who ride our vehicles rely on us to do their daily activities, so it's very important that this culture provide for them a way to live their life," Ciccarella says.

One aspect that sets SCR apart, he says, is the hands-on approach the owners bring to the table. "With Mr. and Mrs. Rakestraw right there, this culture that we've developed and instilled in every employee sets us apart from some of the other companies in the area that don't have that kind of ownership on site."

Through SCR, Ciccarella also got involved with TLPA, teaching seminars and offering guidance for members with smaller companies, who may not know where to access training.

"I love meeting with them. Especially some of the smaller guys, the moms and pops," Ciccarella says. "It's really interesting to talk with them and to help them out when you can. TLPA is a good organization of people."

"When we teach instructors how to teach properly, we don't teach them to read out of a book. We teach them to engage with the students."

—Frank Ciccarella