

# 2018 Taxicab Operator of the Year

## Robert DeLucia of Star Transportation Group

By Bridget Ann Peery

In 1968, Robert DeLucia Sr. returned home from Vietnam to his native Pittsburgh. And in the years since, he has applied lessons learned during his service in the U.S. Army to his business approach as a fleet operator to stay competitive. Given his background in military intelligence, DeLucia had initial aspirations to join the police and the Central Intelligence Agency. During the application process to those agencies, he drove a taxicab to provide for his family.

Nearly 38 years later, DeLucia is being named this year's TLPA Taxicab Operator of the Year as the owner of Star Transportation Group.

"All I have to do to maintain and grow my company is to provide service. That's what I've done my whole life," DeLucia says, acknowledging the service standards he has kept up throughout his career. Starting from the first day he began driving, he found out what his clients preferred to drink, such as coffee or tea, and would have it ready for them when he picked them up—always dressed in a shirt and tie, of course.

"I'm a veteran. I've always dressed well, maintained my vehicles well," DeLucia says. "That's how I grew my business, with those service standards, and I maintain them."

DeLucia's company flourished over the years by offering consistent service, embracing innovation and, most importantly, continuing to diversify. He began with one cab in 1982 and expanded from there, incorporating the company a few years later to start Star Limousine. He later founded Cranberry Taxi in 1989 and Classy Cab in 2005. In fact, DeLucia was the first to have a stretch limousine in Pittsburgh, driving stars—such as Kenny Rogers and Frank Sinatra—to the local arena for their performances. It is how Star Limousine got its name, DeLucia says.

"The changes that hit our industry over the years have enabled me to survive,"

DeLucia says, noting that he has found opportunities in unexpected places. Two examples of this are Air Star, which DeLucia started shortly after 9/11, and VETaxi, which he established in 2010.

Following 9/11, DeLucia took notice of the extra time needed to get through airport security. So, he created a new division for corporate executives looking to travel within 400 to 500 miles of the Pittsburgh area.

"I could have you there quicker, more conveniently without all the frustration, without waiting for planes and delays," DeLucia says. He used luxury vehicles and shifted to hybrids, eventually switching to alternative fuels, such as propane. In 2009, the Air Star model changed and currently provides ACCESS services.

Following that, DeLucia found a way to assist the country's veterans through VETaxi.

"I saw that there was a patriotic portion of this," DeLucia says, speaking to his desire to offer paratransit, ambulatory and

non-ambulatory services to veterans.

"My business model was American cars built in America... and I decided to use alternative fuels. Then I decided to use American heroes, which are our veterans, as drivers. And I called it VETaxi."

The training program and leadership model offered by VETaxi



Robert DeLucia is the 2018 Taxicab Operator of the Year. He started with one cab in 1982 and has grown Star Transportation to almost 100 vehicles today.

are what set veterans up to succeed, DeLucia says, and he has plans to make VETaxi available across the United States to create opportunities for all military personnel to start their own

businesses. It is not just his diligent work ethic that has made Star Transportation resilient, DeLucia says, but also keeping up with innovative technologies, including natural, green resources and CNG-powered vehicles, as well as cameras and safety features. Even more important is holding a positive vision for the future. And DeLucia remains eternally

optimistic, despite the industry's most recent changes.

"I look at it from a different perspective," DeLucia says, referencing the emergence of TNCs. "We have five branches in the military and the reason we have them is because we all have a common goal and the same mission, and it's the same thing in business."

Today, Star Transportation has 150 employees and between 90 and 100 taxicabs—all of which are independent contractors. DeLucia's two sons, Derek and Robert, joined the company when they were in high school and are integral to running the company.

"I am really pleased and excited about this. I didn't expect anything like this. I'm very grateful," DeLucia says of winning the award. He is looking forward to passing the business on to his sons, a plan that has been years in the making. "I reinvested in myself, in my own family business and my kids' future. And it's worked out well."

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