

TRAVEL EXPERIENCE PAYS FOR COACH DRIVERS – Mt Gravatt Coach and Travel

A Brisbane travel company is dispelling all myths about older drivers and proving experience does pay on the road with 95 per cent of its operators over 45-years-old.

Brisbane based charter coach company Mt Gravatt Coach and Travel has been developing strategies to manage its ageing workforce and recruit, retrain and retain older workers for over 10 years.



Mt Gravatt Coach and Travel driver of 22 years Marie

General Manager Skye Naismith said the company employed 35 drivers, mostly mature-age, and was always looking to recruit more.

“Our company, established in 1974, has undergone a transformation over the past 10 years to cater for the changing demographics of our staff, both current and prospective,” said Skye.

“We became aware that many of our existing drivers were approaching retirement age and were looking at reducing their hours, which would leave significant gaps to fill.

“After closely looking at our options we could see we would have trouble attracting younger people and believe that this industry has many benefits for mature-age people.

“We have found that older drivers are generally more experienced road users, are patient, flexible, have life skills they can call on in an emergency and provide good customer service, especially when dealing with school children.”

Mt Gravatt Coach and Travel runs various bus services including Translink route services, morning and afternoon school services, school charter services such as school sports, and long distance charters.

“We have a variety of work to offer employees and can adapt to what a person is looking for be it school runs for two hours in the morning or long distance coach trips – we have structured our business to best cater for flexible employment options.

Skye said driving for an operator in the school sector like Mt Gravatt Coach and Travel was ideal for older people as they can have flexible work arrangements, they can salary sacrifice so their income has a lessened effect on their pension, and they can have at least 12 weeks a year leave as the work mainly revolves around the school year.

The company also provides accredited and on-the-job training and all drivers have completed their Certificate II in Transport and Distribution and are now completing their Certificate III.

“Training is tailored specific to the job they are doing and it's on-the-job so they are completing it at work, not using their own valuable time.

“We have found training to be a great advantage to our company and to individual employees as it reinforces our company values and how we do things.”

The company is always on the look out for staff and has tried some creative recruitment strategies including advertising for drivers on score cards at the local bowls club.

“We try to place an ad where older people might stumble across it,” said Skye.

“Many mature-age people are not reading through employment pages as they are often not actively seeking work.

“We also are looking at tapping into the Grey Nomads as we can offer a network of school bus operators they could work with across Australia.

“Many older people feel uneasy about applying for a job and make a point of telling us that they are old - often over 60 - and we assure them they’re ‘spring chickens’ compared to some of our employees!”

Skye said the average staff retention rate is seven years and the company also has some longer serving employees like 59-year-old Marie and 68-year-old Jon.

“Marie has been with us for 22 years and Jon was our first employee 27 years ago,” said Skye.



Mt Gravatt Coach and Travel’s most experienced driver 68-year-old Jon

“The sharing of knowledge is fantastic, for example Jon’s knowledge of the area and routes means he is always able to help other drivers out.

“To lose that amount of knowledge would be difficult to replace so we offer flexibility so he’ll stay.”

And Jon has stayed since 1981 when he came to Brisbane from a sheep and cattle station in Charleville.

“I thought ‘I’ll try this for a couple of years’, and the rest is history,” said Jon.

“I’ve known nothing else - I’ve been driving since I left school, it’s what I did in the bush.

“Being a bushie I like the long distance driving – being out on the open road and meeting people, that’s right up my alley.”

Jon said he enjoys the full-time work and is not in a hurry to wind things down.

“When I get to 70 I’ll make a decision on what to do. I’m staying as long as my health holds because I’m happy – I wouldn’t be here if I wasn’t happy.”

Marie started driving with Mt Gravatt Coach and Travel when she was 38-years-old, once her three children were established in school.

“I didn’t want to be at home so I did a typing course and hated it,” said Marie.

“Then I saw a lady driving a bus and said to my husband ‘that is what I’m going to do’.

“I’ve never considered doing anything else – I like kids, I’ve got nine grandchildren so I get to see them over school holidays and I have money to buy them presents.”

Marie has always worked part-time driving the school runs and school sports charters and cannot see herself retiring.

“I couldn’t stay at home all day and I’m not a golfer or tennis player.

“I prefer to be working – it keeps your mind active, plus I like the money.”

Marie recommends driving to other mature-age people who have had some driving experience.

“If you’re sick of being home get out there and have a go.”