

What to Know about Indian Trails: Michigan's Oldest and Largest Family-Owned Bus Transportation Company

SUBMITTED BY INDIAN TRAILS

IT'S LIKELY THAT INDIAN TRAILS, INC. is one of the Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce's most interesting member companies.

Launched in 1910 with a single Ford Model T, Indian Trails is now Michigan's first and largest privately owned bus transportation company, with an eco-friendly fleet of 30-, 52- and 56-passenger buses — all deluxe motorcoaches — that carry passengers anywhere in Michigan or throughout the continental United States and Canada.



Cushman



Mackay

Altogether, its coaches ferry upwards of 1.2 million passengers more than 5 million miles annually. The U.S. Dept. of Transportation ranks Indian Trails in the top 5 percent of transportation companies nationwide for safe driving.

Fun fact: The company was started with the help of a woman co-owner back in 1910, and today — more than 107 years later — is overseen by her five great nieces.

Daily Inter-City Routes

A big part of Owosso-based Indian Trails' business involves operating buses over 38 daily, scheduled inter-city routes throughout Michigan and into Chicago, Milwaukee and Duluth. These routes offer over 100 boarding points, direct connections with both the Amtrak and Greyhound national transportation networks, and the Detroit and Flint international airports.

Eighteen route-running motorcoaches carry the "Pure Michigan" brand — with photos of popular Michigan destinations, and so serve as giant rolling billboards to promote tourism here.

Indian Trails' daily runs operate through Lansing's downtown bus terminal, and the Capital Area Multi-Modal Gateway in East Lansing. (Most Amtrak passengers headed to Chicago start out on an Indian

Trails bus that connects them with their train in Kalamazoo). Essentially, this gives Greater Lansing residents access to virtually all of North America by bus and rail—the safest, most affordable and eco-friendly modes of ground transportation.

Indian Trails' subsidiary Michigan Flyer offers 12 roundtrips daily between East Lansing, Ann Arbor and Detroit Metro Airport (DTW), connecting two great university towns with one another, as well as with approximately 700 daily nonstop airline flights between DTW and the world. Launched in 2006, Michigan Flyer transports more than 200,000 passengers annually with 98 percent on-time reliability. Since 2012, it has also operated the Ann Arbor-DTW segment of its route as "AirRide" in partnership with the Ann Arbor Area Transportation Authority.

Custom Group Charters

Indian Trails also operates a large group charter business specializing in custom transportation solutions for corporations, K-12 schools, colleges, sports teams, trade associations, and many others. Its customers include the Girl Scouts of America, Michigan Education Association, Detroit Lions and Detroit Red Wings, Walmart, Quicken Loans, Mormon Tabernacle Choir, U.S. Army, Ford Motor Company, United Auto Workers, and our state's great public universities.

A group can charter one or more Indian Trails motorcoaches to leave from anywhere in Michigan, or northern Ohio or Indiana, for travel to any destination in the continental U.S. and Canada.

An Innovative History

Indian Trails has always been family-owned. So transportation is in the DNA of the five sisters who currently co-own the company — Mary Ferguson, Billie Maier, Linda Mackay, Harriet "Honey" Biondi and Winalee Zeeb — the great nieces of Wayne and Cora (Phillips) Taylor.

The couple established the "Phillips-Taylor Livery Service" just two years after Henry Ford introduced his Model T, when they recognized a need for public transportation. In 1914, Cora became the first woman in the United States to be issued a chauffeur's license and is recognized as the nation's first woman taxicab driver.



Indian Trails Co-Owners (L-R) Mary Ferguson, Harriet Honey Biondi, Linda Mackay, Billie Maier, and Winalee Zeeb.

Soon after, the company began carrying auto workers to new factories in Flint, renaming the company the Owosso-Flint Bus Line.

By 1930, it had a terminal in downtown Lansing; 30 diesel buses serving Lansing, other cities across Michigan, and Chicago; and nationwide connections with railroads and other bus lines. The company was renamed Indian Trails after its first inter-city route along U.S. 12 — which locals called "the Old Indian Trail."

The company has only had five presidents — each of the Taylors, their nephew Bill Himburg (whose daughters now own the company), his son-in-law Gordon MacKay, and Chad Cushman, who succeeded MacKay in 2016. Like his predecessors who quickly adopted customer-centric innovations such as reclining seats, air conditioning, and two-way radios, MacKay — who now serves as board chair — adhered to the company's guiding principle of putting profits into new equipment. Under his watch, Indian Trails became the first bus company to install video monitors, stereo sound systems, WiFi, and hearing loops in its fleet.

Positive Economic Impacts

National studies estimate that each dollar invested public transportation like Indian Trails' inter-city bus service produces an economic benefit of greater than \$3 in the communities served.

Michigan Flyer alone brings more than 65,000 out-of-state visitors a year to mid-Michigan, where they collectively spend an estimated \$83 million and have a total impact of \$151 million on the economy. Its connections with airlines at DTW greatly enhance the Lansing region's ability to attract major events and conventions. ■