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## Lorenz Bus Service

Minneapolis, MN

**Service  
Diversification  
Critical**



Mike Canine



Ben Canine



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# SERVICE DIVERSIFICATION CRITICAL



## Lorenz Bus Service

By Harrell Kerkhoff  
Busline Magazine  
Editor

*"If this pandemic has shown us anything, it's the importance of a diverse transportation operation."*

*To say the least, it's been an interesting, challenging and, yes, productive 12-plus months for brothers **Mike and Ben Canine** and fellow co-workers at **Lorenz Bus Service** — a charter, school and scheduled service transportation provider, based in **Minneapolis, MN**.*

Just as everyone involved at Lorenz Bus Service has worked hard to keep the company moving forward during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic — and consequent business slowdown — **Mike Canine, vice president of customer experience** at Lorenz Bus Service, has also been quite busy in other ways, such as being a member of the industry's "Gang of 11."

Despite its name, the group actually consists of 12 bus/motorcoach operators and vendors who have spent countless hours, over the past year, supporting and aiding lobbying efforts to acquire more federal funding for the bus/motorcoach industry. The group's goal has also been to build greater recognition of the industry's importance. The "Gang of 11" has also been instrumental in signing congressional co-sponsors of the Coronavirus Economic Relief for Transportation Services (CERTS) Act for the industry.

"While my brother (**Ben Canine, Lorenz Bus Service vice president & general counsel**) has enjoyed success helping our company implement new systems and keeping the business running, I

(along with many others) have spent a considerable amount of time with lobbying efforts on behalf of the industry," Mike Canine said. "Over the past months, we (the Gang of 11) have scheduled daily phone calls, involving hundreds of meetings. That includes contacting bus company representatives from all over the country and helping them communicate with their legislators — telling their stories as operators. We then jump on those calls to tell the legislators our industry's national story and its importance. That has been done hundreds of times over the better part of a year, and I feel it's made a big impact.

**"Our industry has been self-reliant and pretty quiet in the past, but I believe there is an evolution of conscientiousness taking place among many operators, as it pertains to telling our industry's story.** In that vein, I think the past year has proven beneficial for our industry's future."

Both Mike and Ben Canine credit Lorenz Bus Service's diversification as helping the company weather the pandemic.

"Fortunately, some of our scheduled service remained operational during much of the pandemic. That greatly helped our company, as the charter side was pretty quiet for several months (at Lorenz Bus



Service),” Mike Canine said. “Our work with professional and collegiate sports teams came back the fastest. Meanwhile, with regard to our school bus business, we were able to hold on to most of our key employees in that department, as state and local governments needed our services to deliver meals to various communities.

“When considering everything that has taken place since March 2020 in our industry, we (at Lorenz Bus Service) have been fortunate. A certain amount of work has been available to us. Again, the key has been our diversification. As a company, we also have done a lot of things to adjust and adapt.”

That includes using such technology as electrostatic sprayers, UV lighting and bipolar ionization on vehicles in an effort to battle the COVID-19 virus, as well as using EPA List N chemicals for disinfection.

“We have also installed plastic barriers between our drivers and passengers, and make sure passengers are properly spaced throughout our vehicles. In Minnesota, passengers are also required to wear face masks,” Mike Canine said. “It’s vital that we continue to follow best practices used in our industry in terms of cleaning, and to proceed with the utmost in caution.”

Making sure customer groups are informed of all



*Top photo: Ben Canine (left) and Mike Canine. Bottom photo: Isaiah Newell, director of operations.*

that has been done at Lorenz Bus Service to properly protect passengers from COVID-19 remains a key objective, along with taking advantage of company downtime during today’s slower-than-normal business activity.

According to Ben Canine, by March 14, 2020, “the floor dropped out,” of the U.S. transportation

industry, causing charter business to evaporate and schools to shut down.

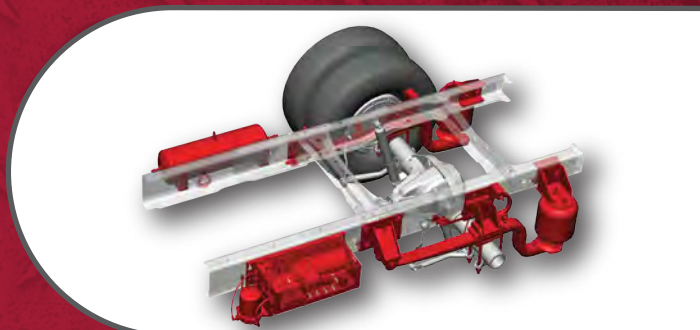
“It wasn’t too long afterward that (the U.S.) Congress passed the CARES Act. As a company, we quickly took advantage of PPP (Paycheck Protection Program). We also made a decision early on that Lorenz Bus Service would continue to pay all of its active employees with PPP funds, even though, at the time, we didn’t have much for them to do,” Ben Canine said. “We felt it was very important to take care of our people. They are what sets us apart.”

In an effort to make “lemonade out of lemons,” officials at Lorenz Bus Service

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used FMCSA (Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration) training curriculum — during the early stages of company downtime — to provide additional training opportunities for its workforce. FMCSA's motorcoach training curriculum involves a set of courses that focuses on major safety items. Included are how to properly pre-trip a bus, the proper way to operate a wheelchair lift according to ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) guidelines, hours of service regulations and proper vehicle maintenance.

"Those are all important items when making sure we continue to be a safe operator. We took that content, adapted it and made it our own. We then published modules for every person in the company," Ben Canine said. "We felt that if our employees were going to take advantage of PPP, in association with Lorenz Bus Service, they should also take part in the training curriculum. Approximately eight weeks after the U.S. economy shut down (due to the pandemic), nearly every employee in our company completed that training.

"A bonus was that the training gave our employees something to do during the stay-at-home order. It kept them engaged, and provided a feeling that there is, indeed, a future in the transportation business."

Officials at Lorenz Bus Service also involved its workforce as the company strived to meet a COVID-19 preparedness plan, required by the Minnesota governor, in order to reopen.

"Within a matter of hours, we were able to put a plan together and send it to our employees working from home," Ben Canine said. "As part of the plan, our employees watched videos on how our company was tackling sanitation issues, face mask requirements,

social distancing, etc. At the time, those concepts were very new. This whole process, with our employees, was one of our company's main achievements during the slowdown."

Mike Canine added: "We have many friends in the industry who are struggling as they work to bring their employees back. We have had such problems as well, but found much success by keeping our people engaged."

Officials at Lorenz Bus Service are starting to see slow signs of recovery unfold within the Twin Cities, as more businesses reopen, sport seasons re-emerge and a growing number of people feel comfortable traveling in groups again — even if it requires social distancing and the wearing of face masks.

"The recovery is there, but it has been slow at times. Helping prop up our activity this spring has been demand for transportation from collegiate and professional sports teams," Mike Canine said. "Those customers have been using two to three times as many vehicles as they normally would require, due to social distancing practices. However, that is changing. We are seeing sports teams that were using two or three buses, switching back to one or two as more players become vaccinated."

Lorenz Bus Service not only provides transportation involving the University of Minnesota's athletic department, but also various professional sports teams that call the Twin Cities home — along with many of their incoming opponents.

"Overall, if there is a large event in our area, it's safe to say we are either the transportation manager for that event, or at least have a lot of vehicles involved," Mike Canine said. "Lorenz Bus Service provides

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quality vehicles, featuring key amenities and a dedicated workforce. **Consistency is the key, along with listening to customers. That helps us to do the little things that make the big difference.**

As for greater success in the near future, he added, it's critical that conventions start taking place again and tour groups increase their requests.

"Those are the activities that we — as a company and as an industry — need to see more of moving forward. I forecast that, overall, this summer will still be slow," Mike Canine said. "The good news is, as a company, we are seeing more interest among customers for transportation in September and October."

### TWIN CITIES PROVIDE A SOLID HOME BASE

**A**lthough Lorenz Bus Service vehicles are visible throughout Minnesota, the Midwest and in various areas of the United States, the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area — with its estimated 3.64 million residents — is home base for the company.

Commonly known as the Twin Cities, Minneapolis is Minnesota's most populous city, while St. Paul is the state's capital. COVID-19 notwithstanding, Mike and Ben Canine both said it's a good place to call home, as well as operate a transportation business.

"There are many opportunities here when it comes to places that people want to visit. That includes area colleges/universities, the Mall of America, sporting events and casinos," Mike Canine said. "There are also quite a few Fortune 500 corporations headquartered here. As a company, we are fortunate to be located in a metropolitan



*Lorenz Bus Service is headquartered in a Minneapolis facility located on a 12.5-acre lot.*

area that provides such a variety of work, and that the work is relatively consistent throughout the year. Obviously, like all places, some months are better than others.

"I would estimate that 95 percent of our work originates in the Twin Cities area. Much of that work keeps us close to home, but not always. We have had motorcoaches running as far away as Alaska, Florida, Washington, D.C., and California. We will send vehicles to wherever our clients need to go."

Lorenz Bus Service's history spans 60-plus years. It started as "Rice-Edgerton Lines," named after two prominent streets in the area, and provided fixed-route public transit services between the northern suburbs and downtown areas of Minneapolis and St. Paul.

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In time, the company became a major contractor for the Metropolitan Council, a local government entity responsible for organizing public transit. Business was later expanded into the charter transportation field.

"In the early days, Rice-Edgerton Lines was the northern public transportation provider within the Twin Cities, while other companies took care of the southern half," Mike Canine said. "After several decades of operation, the business was acquired by **Jim Lorenz**, who changed the company's name and started to focus more on charter work, while still maintaining line routes."

In the mid-1990s, **James Canine** (father of Mike and Ben) purchased Lorenz Bus Service, along with his business partner, **Alan Gingold**.

"At the time, Alan and my father were active in brokering the sale of small and medium-size businesses. That is what they were doing for Lorenz Bus Service, when a deal to sell the business fell short. Jim Lorenz convinced Alan and my dad to purchase the company themselves, which they did. The rest, as they say, is history," Mike Canine said. "Dad was active in the business until a few years ago, although he remains on our company's board of directors. Alan, meanwhile, continues to be a close family friend and company advisor. Like Dad, Alan has been critical to our company's success, helping pass the torch to Ben and myself."

"Our service structure has changed quite a bit over the past 10-plus years. When I started in 2009, (Lorenz Bus Service) was primarily a scheduled service provider, involving public transit. It included a fleet of buses transporting passengers on regular routes. Since then, we have expanded charter and school bus operations, while focusing less on the scheduled service model. We began to pivot away from public transit after the expansion of light rail in our area. That caused

local transit authorities to redistribute and adjust how they covered routes. In response, we grew our school bus sector, now involving three school districts, along with our charter business."

Today, the fleet at Lorenz Bus Service consists of approximately 125 school buses, 80 transit buses, 30 motorcoaches and 10 minibuses. The company's privately held transit buses are now used for employee shuttle work, along with special events and projects that are seasonal in nature. That includes transporting visitors to, and from, the annual 12-day Minnesota State Fair, located in Falcon Heights, MN, a suburb of St. Paul. The latter project, Mike and Ben Canine explained, is quite an undertaking. According to organizers, it's the largest state fair in the United States when it comes to average daily attendance.

"We became the main transportation provider for the Minnesota State Fair about 15 years ago. Approximately 2 million state fair attendees ride our buses over the 12-day period," Ben Canine said. "It involves 2,500 scheduled shifts, and is a tremendous project for our company. Personally, it's also a source of pride. I'm heavily involved with the project's transportation logistics."

Leaving the legal profession, Ben Canine came to work for the family business several years after his brother.

"I used to be a law clerk for a federal judge, and then I became a prosecutor for the city of Minneapolis. I left that position to work with my family at Lorenz Bus Service," Ben Canine said. "I didn't know much about the bus business, but that has since changed. Like many people in this industry, I wear several hats at Lorenz Bus Service, but mainly focus on our operating system."

Another key family member involved with Lorenz Bus Service is

**Continued On Page 46**

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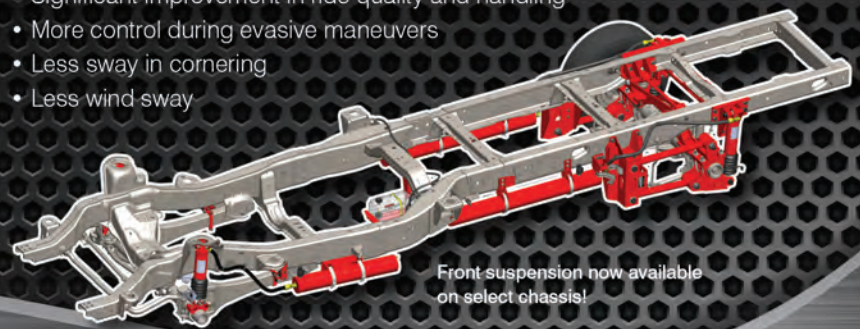
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**Trudy Canine**, wife of James and mother of Mike and Ben. Over the years, she has successfully operated her own human resources company, and has also played a key role in Lorenz Bus Service's success.

"We all bring to the company different areas of expertise and experience. My father has a financial and accounting background. Ben is a lawyer, and our mother has been very successful working in human resources. My background is in sales and marketing," Mike Canine said. "We usually figure out together the right answers to different situations, relying on our various perspectives."

### THE IMPORTANCE OF TECHNOLOGY

**S**till based on the north side of the Twin Cities, Lorenz Bus Service is headquartered in a Minneapolis facility located on a 12.5-acre lot, 90 percent of which is paved for plenty of parking. The location is surrounded by security fencing and includes three above-ground fuel tanks — one each for diesel, gas and propane.

"We can simultaneously dispense fuel for seven buses," Ben Canine said. "Light poles in the parking lot include security cameras, charging outlets and Wi-Fi."

The majority of Lorenz Bus Service's motorcoach fleet consists of Van Hool CX45 vehicles. Officials at Lorenz have enjoyed a long and successful relationship with ABC Companies, the exclusive U.S. and Canadian distributor of Van Hool motorcoaches.

"Our company was one of the first operators in the Twin Cities market to purchase Van Hools from ABC Companies. We have had a long and strong relationship over the years with ABC since that initial purchase," Mike Canine said. "ABC has become a valuable

partner, helping us (Lorenz Bus Service) grow our fleet over the past 10 years.

"The close proximity of ABC Companies' Faribault, MN, location (approximately 50 miles south of Minneapolis-St. Paul) has also allowed us to stock fewer parts at our own facility. Over the years, officials at ABC have helped us troubleshoot mechanical issues, and have provided demo buses when needed."

Today, Van Hool vehicles operated by Lorenz Bus Service are used in a variety of ways — from over-the-road charter trips to transporting Minnesota State Fair attendees. Overall, Lorenz Bus Service provides a diverse fleet that can accommodate a variety of needs.

"That includes black mini-buses, with leather seating, that are decked out with a variety of amenities, similar to what would be expected from a limousine provider," Ben Canine said. "Our goal is to be a one-stop operation, meeting the many different transportation demands from customers."

"It's very important to all of our customers that we feature a nice interior. Along with leather seating, other important amenities are Wi-Fi, outlets, tables and rear windows," Mike Canine added. "Passengers appreciate being able to plug their electronic devices to nearby tables, seats and/or overhead monitors. With some of our vehicles, we have even taken out seats and added tables. That is especially important for sports teams during longer trips. In particular, it allows collegiate athletes a better place to study before, or after, a game."

Many passengers are also impressed by contour parcel racks found inside the company's Van Hool motorcoaches. The feature, Mike Canine said, allows room for larger monitors.

Taking advantage of technological advancements for the office is also essential at Lorenz Bus Service. That includes the integration of the company's accounting and maintenance systems, improving efficiencies and reducing paper usage.

"We put that system together as the pandemic progressed, which was key since so many of our people were working from home," Ben Canine said. "The process takes advantage of cloud computing, allowing us, for example, to send a payment to a vendor's bank account, with a click of a button."

Officials at Lorenz Bus Service have also fine-tuned software that allows the company to better check on the availability of drivers.

"There are a lot of moving pieces in this business," Ben Canine added. **"We continue to do everything we can, with the aid of technology, to help our company run as smoothly as possible."**

Updates in marketing and branding have also proven to be beneficial.

"As a company, we have built a lot of relationships over the years within the Twin Cities market, involving various destinations and other sources of business. That is part of our approach to marketing," Mike Canine said.

On the branding side, Lorenz Bus Service caught the attention of many area residents after introducing a new look involving many of its vehicles.



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“When we started pivoting away from the transit business, it was decided to change our main bus color — from white to blue,” Mike Canine explained. “It made a big difference in our branding. At one point, we had two blue buses and the rest of the fleet was still white. One day, as I was visiting with community members, I told a person that I worked for Lorenz Bus Service. That person responded, ‘Oh, you are with the company that has the *blue buses*.’ Since we only had two blue vehicles on the road at that time, I knew our new color scheme was working. We remain very cognizant, and continue to evaluate, all of our branding efforts.”

#### TACKLING CHALLENGES, FINDING OPPORTUNITIES

**D**espite enormous challenges, officials at Lorenz Bus Service are looking forward to what the future can bring for a diverse transportation provider.

**“As a company, our main focus going forward is to consistently improve. That can be achieved with the help of advanced technology, greater efficiency and improved fleet strategy,”** Mike Canine said. “For example, we are always accessing the right time to buy and/or sell vehicles, our cost structure and where we fit within the current marketplace.

“Service diversification also remains critical. If this pandemic has shown us anything, it’s the importance of a diverse transportation operation.”

Of course, success is not possible without good employees — a fact not lost on Mike and Ben Canine. For a bus/motorcoach operator, that includes finding — and retaining — quality drivers.

“Historically, we have fared very well in finding and keeping good drivers. For us, I think the key is positive word-of-mouth about our company, and remaining consistent when it comes to driver recruitment,” Mike Canine said. “We offer competitive wages, benefits and advocate for our drivers in different ways. For example, all paperwork sent to customers reminds them about the importance of driver gratuity. As a company, we are doing everything we can to advocate and create a safe and good place to work.”

Along with participating in specific training programs provided by Lorenz Bus Service, including classroom work, drivers for the company are also sent to the Minnesota Highway Safety & Research Center, which offers a course on defensive driving and basic driving maneuvers.

“Overall, it’s important that we provide a combination of soft skilled and technical training, helping prepare our drivers for whatever they may face on the road,” Mike Canine said.

Part of being a good driver, or any employee, also involves understanding, and excelling at, customer service.

**“Customer service is in the eye of the beholder. Again, it depends on what your customers want,”** Mike Canine said. **“It’s therefore important to identify their needs. When it comes to customer service, due diligence is critical.”**

To make that point, Mike Canine described what it took for Jim Harbaugh, head football coach at the University of Michigan, to take notice of an added value provided by Lorenz Bus Service, during a team trip.



*Among the amenities found on certain Lorenz Bus Service vehicles are tables, especially important to collegiate athletes when studying before, or after, a game.*

“When it comes to service, our company’s philosophy is, ‘Ask customers what things are most important to them, and then pay attention to their responses.’ When it came to transporting Michigan’s football team, we learned that Jim Harbaugh likes Diet Coke,” Mike Canine said. “Even though it was not requested by the team, we made sure that our lead driver had a cooler containing two bottles of Diet Coke. The bottles were wiped down and put into a clear plastic bag, with a sticker that verified they have been sanitized.

“Every time (Harbaugh) boarded the bus, our driver handed him the bag with Diet Coke. The team’s director of operations was thrilled, as we paid attention to the smallest of details. By the end of day, everyone on that vehicle was talking about the Diet Coke.

**“When it comes to customer service, in many cases what we do goes far beyond just providing a safe vehicle for transportation. That is part of it, but we are**

**also facilitators — trying to make each trip a seamless and positive experience for each client.”**



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