

MINISTRY OF THE MONTH

SPOTLIGHTING YOUR GROUPS



Activity Buses Offer Safe Transportation **UPGRADE**

By Bob West

In response to a 2001 National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) consumer advisory stating that 15-passenger vans are especially prone to roll over when fully loaded, The Salvation Army of Metropolitan Atlanta had worked for years to find replacement vehicles for the 15-passenger vans in its fleet.

The organization had many requirements for the new vehicles. They needed vehicles that could be used seven days a week to transport hundreds of children and adults to the organization's eight community centers throughout Atlanta, to and from its four Boys and Girls Clubs, to summer day camps and Sunday services. With a variety of drivers, riders and uses, The Salvation Army needed safe transportation that was affordable, versatile and reliable.

Across state lines, at the Crosswell Home for Children in



Sumter, South Carolina, executive director Jerry Allred had vehicles that “met our needs” and “got us anywhere we needed to go,” but the home’s 10-year old 14-passenger buses were in need of an upgrade.

Crosswell provides a safe, nurturing Christian home to children who cannot live with their families. As many as 40 children who live at the Crosswell Home must be transported by bus to public schools, local churches, and a variety of field trips and extracurricular activities in the community. Allred wanted safe, reliable vehicles that were cost-efficient and were not intimidating to the staff.

Both Crosswell and The Salvation Army purchased Multi-Function School Activity Buses (MFSABs) to upgrade their fleets.

According to three nationally recognized authorities, the National Academy of Sciences, the U.S. Department of Transportation and the National Safety Council, school buses and MFSABs are the safest form of surface transportation.

MFSABs meet the same Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards (FMVSS) as school buses, but are not required to have stop arms or traffic control lights and, in most states, are not required to be yellow. You will find many of the best safety features of the iconic yellow school bus with optional upgrades in the extremely reliable MFSABs.

MFSAB vehicles are held to a higher safety standard than similarly-sized vans. This provides church and service organizations the peace of mind that their MFSAB vehicles meet the strictest standards in their class.

MFSABs are built with sturdy steel cages so they can withstand a rollover better than other vehicles. In addition, seating is designed to compartmentalize passengers in the event of an accident and seat backs are engineered to absorb energy.

MFSABs are required to have multiple emergency exits and rugged body construction for side impact protection. Seat belts, three-point safety belt seats, and five-point harnesses are available as options with regular bench-style seating.

While safety is the No. 1 priority for many customers, popular upgrades include storage options that allow church groups to carry more supplies and equipment on long-distance trips.

Allred particularly liked the “big bus features,” such as the alarm that alerts drivers if a child is left on the bus, the much roomier back-of-the-bus space, and improved, higher clearance steps.

However, many of the religious, social service, and community organizations that transport children also transport adults and seniors who may prefer more comfortable seats. Coach-style seats may be ordered on many MFSABs to give passengers increased comfort without compromising safety.

Nick Corley, MyBus MFSAB sales manager for The Bus Group of Atlanta, helped The Salvation Army select and train drivers on the new activity buses. The buses selected to replace all of the organization’s vans have wider seats and three point lap/shoulder belts. Drivers told Corley the new buses felt “very automotive.”

Corley noted that federal law mandates that any vehicles “significantly used to transport” children to school or school activities



must meet FMVSS.

Although the law is enforced differently in each state, Corley said that Georgia is currently training state troopers on the mandate, and he expects enhanced enforcement in the near future.

“When The Salvation Army realized it was time to upgrade, they cut no corners, took no shortcuts. They purchased really nice buses that meet the strictest safety standards to serve them well going forward,” said Corley. [RPN](#)

Bob West is product manager, Type A, Thomas Built Buses, a leading North American bus manufacturer, bringing quality buses to a wide range of customers. Thomas Built’s MFSABs are available from a dedicated group of highly specialized dealers to assist you in selecting safe, reliable transportation, www.MyBus.com.

Here are some terms you should know when researching group transportation options.

[NHTSA-National Highway Traffic Safety Administration](#)

This division of the federal Department of Transportation regulates and sets standards that must be met by manufacturers of various types of passenger vehicles. Go to www.nhtsa.gov for more information.

[FMVSS-Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards](#)

This refers to specific standards that a certain class of vehicle must meet to be compliant with NHTSA regulations. For instance, FMVSS 220 refers to school bus roll over safety standards.

[MFSAB-Multi-Function School Activity Bus](#)

MFSABs meet the same Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards (FMVSS) as school buses, but are not required to have stop arms or traffic control lights and, in most states, are not required to be yellow. The MFSAB is designed to meet all NHTSA’s criteria for safe student transportation.