

Judy Swystun, president of Hampton Roads Transportation Inc., in First Person

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Judy Swystun recently accepted a national award from the Taxicab, Limousine and Paratransit Association as its 2013 Taxicab Large Fleet Operator of the Year. Her company provides dispatching administration and maintenance for Black and White Cabs of Norfolk; Black and White Cabs of Virginia Beach; Yellow Cab of Hampton; Norfolk Checker Taxi; Yellow Cab of Norfolk; and Yellow Cab of Newport News.



Her beginning

I'm from Norfolk, born and raised here. I've lived here all my life, except for going away to college. I went to Emory University, where I received my associate's degree, and I got my bachelor's in math from Mercer University in Macon, Ga.

I was going to be a high school math teacher, but I decided it was not for me. The children I was teaching were so close to my age that I didn't feel I had a command of the classroom, and I had a poor mentor when I was a student teacher. She went on vacation, and I never saw her again. I was a young girl, and here I was in front of a classroom with no one to guide me. Now, though, I think I could do it.

I came back to Virginia from school and I talked to my dad. I said, "Dad, I would like to go back to college and back up my math degree with computer science courses."

He said, "That's great, but I'd like for you to join me in the taxi company full-time."

I said, "OK," and the rest is history.

On what she does

We provide the dispatch, administration and maintenance for local taxi cab companies. I started in Norfolk with Checkered Taxi and it's still a part of Hampton Road Transportation. We also provide service for Black and White Cab of Virginia Beach and Yellow Cab of Hampton and Yellow Cab of Newport news.

When I started, we didn't have a fax machine. We basically took dispatch orders via telephone and on a piece of paper.

Now everything is comput-erized. You call in and every-thing is entered into the computer. There are GPSs in all the taxicabs and mobile data terminals. There is no more voice dispatch. It's all computerized dispatch. There are credit cards in all the cabs, and there are video cameras for safety purposes.

It's completely different. And we are about to roll out a new service called "App-A-Cab," where you can push a button on your smart phone and it orders you a cab.

On women in her industry

Thirty percent of the industry is now made up of women. Actually, it was to my advantage. Men were very positive toward me and very helpful. I only lost one contract for not being a good old boy.

For the most the part, I would say I was treated well. It was all based on whether or not you were knowledgeable and out there giving top-quality service and a top-quality product.

As long as you did that, you were good to go.

On charity work

We provide safe-ride-home programs. We give every year to Wounded Warriors. We provide rides to those in domestic violence programs and we provide free rides to seniors.

I would also say that we are pioneers in the hiring of the disabled. We have a deaf mechanic and two blind call- takers.

Those she serves

I say to people that we are like the Statue of Liberty. We take every person from every walk of life, from a businessperson to a little old lady going to the grocery store to Navy

personnel and, of course, late at night, we take those who have had a little too much to drink.

Interview by Bill Cresenzo

Link: <http://insidebiz.com/news/judy-swystun-president-hampton-roads-transportation-inc-first-person>