

Many FMCA members in the baby boomer generation have followed in their parents' or grandparents' footsteps and acquired their own motorhomes. Others are trying out the RV lifestyle for the first time, buying a coach as their discretionary income allows. But Mike Middaugh didn't wait. He became an FMCA member before the age of 21 and is quite likely the youngest motorhome owner ever to join the association on his own. Through the years, his fascination with motor coaches has never waned.

BITTEN BY THE BUG

Mike grew up in Oxford, Ohio, also the hometown of J. Howard and Gwyn DuBois, F741. The DuBoises first owned a Dodge Motor Home, a brand that later became the popular Travco; next they owned a converted bus. In addition, they were members of an organization called Family Motor Coach Association. Mike's own family was not involved in camping, so he was invited to go on RV trips with the DuBois family. Destinations included numerous rallies hosted by FMCA's Midwest Coachmen chapter, as well as FMCA conventions. Mike's

first convention was the association's second: a gathering in Greenville, Ohio, in July 1965, with 232 coaches present. He was just 16.

His first "really big trip" with the DuBois family occurred in the summer of 1966. They traveled more than 6,000 miles to the ice fields of British Columbia, with a stop at the FMCA summer convention that June in Glenwood, Minnesota. "Other than the coaches at the convention, we saw a grand total of five other motorhomes or bus conversions the entire trip," he said.

As a teen, Mike recalled, he "loved

A "BUS GUY" THROUGH AND THROUGH

BY ROBBIN GOULD, EDITOR



the buses, especially the Flxibles."

"I liked the design, and how aerodynamic they were and ahead of their time," he explained, "plus the fact that they were Ohio-built [in the town of Loudonville]. There were more of them around, so they were used commercially more, and as a result they were retired from commercial service in greater numbers than others."

Mike signed up with FMCA, first as an associate member because he didn't own a motorhome. That changed in 1969, when he had the opportunity to purchase a snub-nosed Carpenter school bus, a 1961 model that was being retired from service in Buffalo, New York. Sale price: \$1,000.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF MIKE MIDDAGH

membership to full status. In October 1969, at age 20, he was assigned member number F3456.

As for the good fortune to receive such a “catchy” number, it probably didn’t hurt that Mike was a friend and college classmate of Dee Dee Scott, daughter of Ken and Dotty Scott, L63. Ken took over leadership of FMCA when association headquarters was moved from founder Bob Richter’s Hanson, Massachusetts, hometown to Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1965. Ken served as FMCA’s first executive director for many years.

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Mike Middaugh has attended nearly 50 FMCA conventions and countless chapter rallies since the 1960s. These include FMCA’s Perry, Georgia, convention in 2011 (left) and the Midwest Coachmen chapter’s May 1971 rally in Indianapolis, Indiana (below). He competed in canoe battles at FMCA’s 1973 Du Quoin, Illinois, convention (opposite, right side of each photo).

Mike Middaugh, F3456, has spent decades immersed in the world of buses and coach conversions, both personally and professionally.

The bus required a complete conversion. “I did most of the work on my own, along with a few unpaid helpers,” Mike said. “You just had to figure it out as you went.”

When the conversion was completed that same year, the bus sported a new green paint job, along with slanting, sliding windows that replaced the conventional top-opening types. The rows of seats were gone; in their place were residential touches such as a shower, a galley, and twin beds in the rear. Two seats were retained to form the dinette — they were installed face-to-face with a table in between. His first trips in the bus were to Midwest Coachmen rallies.

Mike also converted his FMCA





Mike established Coach Quarters LLC, an executive coach charter company, in 2004 and provided presidential candidate John McCain's "Straight Talk Express" campaign tour bus in 2008 (left). Current clients include the Cincinnati Reds (below) and the Big Ten Network (bottom).



THE BUS BEAT

During his college years at Miami University in Oxford, Mike began working for a local charter bus company as a driver and sales rep. He also remained active in the Midwest Coachmen chapter, including a stint as chapter newsletter editor.

After graduation, Mike went to work for Phil and Bea Robertson, F1147, owners of Angola Coach in Angola, Indiana, C154, an FMCA commercial member. He sold his converted Carpenter and purchased the next of the 10 personal conversion coaches he has owned over the years.

Mike left Angola to embark on a career in city transit maintenance and operations with a Michigan company. He next managed a large transit bus remanufacturing facility in Chicago, which was followed by a position at another transit bus rebuilder in Minnesota. Throughout this time, he always owned a converted bus.

"I also got married and had two children, who soon learned the only way to travel was by motor coach," Mike said.

In 1990 Mike joined Custom Coach Corporation, C14, in Columbus, Ohio. Established by Kirwan Elmers and his father, Miles, in 1955, the company was known as an innovator and creator of luxury RVs from

bus shells and also a longtime FMCA commercial member. Mike performed various roles during his 15 years with the company, among them sales manager, director of service, and general manager of leasing.

The client list at Custom Coach included a lengthy list of entertainers, celebrities, royalty, and well-known corporations. Mike sold hundreds of new and used coach conversions and, as a commercial exhibitor at FMCA events, boasted a 13-year run of never missing an FMCA international convention. His conversion background stood him in good stead when he

began working for Marathon Coach Corporation, C2654, another longtime FMCA commercial member, based in Coburg, Oregon.

In 2004 Mike founded an executive coach charter business, Coach Quarters LLC (www.coachquarters.com). Today the company operates eight converted Prevost and MCI buses out of Columbus and Cincinnati, Ohio. Custom excursions may range anywhere from a one-day trip to a marketing tour that may span several months. The buses are often "wrapped" with a decorative cover for promotional purposes.

One notable customer was Senator John McCain and his “Straight Talk Express,” which was used during his 2008 presidential campaign; the coach’s role was reprised for an appearance in the 2012 HBO Emmy Award-winning political drama *Game Change*. Another corporate client is BMW, which used a Coach Quarters bus as a roving headquarters during a 2012 cross-country tour promoting the Mini Cooper automobile.

Sports promotion makes up a significant portion of Coach Quarters’ business. For example, they bring the players to the people during the Reds Caravan, an annual rite of winter for Cincinnati Reds baseball fans. Each January three Coach Quarters buses transport Reds players, broadcasters, and front office staff to cities and towns throughout Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky, and West Virginia. In 2013 the buses traveled a combined total of 2,800 miles, making 15 fan stops in four days.

Mike drives one of the buses during the Reds’ tour. “It’s a longtime thing,” he said. “We’ve done it for eleven or twelve years now, starting with one bus and now three. In all of Major League Baseball, it’s for sure the biggest deal of any of the

professional sports teams as far as a preseason publicity tour goes.”

Other sports clients include the Cincinnati Bengals, Cleveland Browns, Pittsburgh Penguins, and Big Ten Network.

THE FMCA CONNECTION

Amazingly, Mike is in his 47th year of active participation in FMCA. His friendships span the family and commercial sides and include association officers, rank-and-file motorhomers, commercial members, and national office staff. He has served on the *FMC Magazine* Panel since 2002 and is currently a member of the Anniversary Committee. He is president of FMCA’s Pipe Dreamers chapter, whose members are FMCA full or lifetime members with membership numbers lower than 28284 (the number that stood when Ken Scott retired from FMCA). He also is active in several FMCA converted-coach chapters.

Mike has attended nearly 50 FMCA international conventions, now called Family Reunions. He remains close friends with Kirwan Elmers; in fact, they plan to travel in a 1977 MCI Custom Coach conversion to Gillette, Wyoming, for FMCA’s 88th Family Reunion and Motorhome Showcase, June 19-22, 2013.

FROM THE BUS SEAT

When their children were young, Mike and his wife, Fran, took many family bus trips, which often were scheduled in conjunction with work commitments. Sometimes bus travel was so frequent, he quipped, “they wouldn’t ride from Columbus to Oxford without going by coach” — a two-hour drive to visit relatives. As the children grew older, time for family travel decreased. Now Mike and Fran have started to share motor coaching with their two young grandchildren.

In between work and travel commitments, Mike spends time restoring his 1957 Flxible Starliner, which features a raised roof and “eyebrow” windows. He calls it “my favorite motor coach of all time.” He also owns a personal MCI bus in addition to the Coach Quarters fleet.

JUST PART OF THE JOURNEY

Some might be struck by the depth of Mike’s passion for buses. These vehicles have defined his life and career, but he downplays the devotion.

“It’s a real sickness, but indeed pretty rare,” he said wryly. “I guess when you find something you like, you might as well stick with it.” **FMCA**

The Pipe Dreamers

Mike Middaugh, F3456 (right), is current president of FMCA’s Pipe Dreamers chapter, a group that keeps alive the pioneering spirit of FMCA. The chapter was chartered in 1991 and named after the magazine column “Pipe Dreams,” penned by the late Ken Scott, L63, the association’s first executive director. Its members have numbers lower than 28284 — those issued to motorhomers who joined FMCA before the close of 1977, the year Ken retired. The chapter meets at each FMCA Family Reunion. Many of its members have attended 50-plus FMCA conventions and hundreds of chapter and regional rallies, and have logged thousands of motorhome miles. And, yes, the chapter will meet at the upcoming Family Reunion in Gillette, Wyoming.

