

How Upgrading Vehicles, Embracing the Web has Made Prince William Yellow Cab Successful



Potomac Local Leaders

So what's your annual commute look like? Ten thousand miles? Seventeen thousand miles? Twenty-five thousand miles? How about 50,000? A local family that owns [Yellow Cab of Prince William County](#) logged over two million miles in 2012 and they did it with a smile.

[Unlike the craziness we try to avoid on the roads](#), Yellow Cab's deep family values and commitment to safety makes them leaders in their industry. Tammy Beard, Owner and President took a moment to share her family's story.

Vickers: Can you explain how Yellow Cab of Prince William started and how your family approach in business has gotten you to where you are today?

Beard: My father, Ira C. (Corky) Cochran, had a job as a two-way radio repair and installation technician and was installing and repairing radios in cabs in Alexandria (mid 1960s). He asked one of the drivers, Vernon Havenner, if he made any money driving a cab. Vernon said yes and soon Corky was a part time cab driver and full time radio tech.

In a very short while Corky was making more money driving than with radios and he became a full time driver and part-time radio guy. After working as a driver for a while he picked up a dispatch shift that the company needed filled because someone didn't show up for work. He excelled at dispatching and that soon became his full time position (he still drove a cab part time). The owner of Yellow Cab in Alexandria (Cecil Furman) soon had my father working in the business office as the General Manager. He held this position until the early 1980s.

In 1978 he received a call from Howard Mountjoy of Triangle. Mr. Mountjoy owned a cab company and wanted to sell. A meeting was arranged and Mr. Mountjoy expressed to my father his wishes for my father to purchase the company (Radio Cab of Triangle). The purchase included a phone number, five cabs, of which three were road worthy, and the Greyhound Commission Agency in Triangle.

I began working with him as a dispatcher and ticket agent after school and on the weekends. Shortly after purchasing Radio Cab, he purchased Yellow Cab of Triangle and Quantico. In 1982 our fleet was 14 cabs strong and he sold the companies that were now called Radio Yellow Cab. In 1983, he took possession of the company back and we started again. Shortly after we started over he purchased Dale City Taxi and we moved our offices to Woodbridge and became Yellow Cab.



In 2004, Corky passed away and I took over the day to day operations and became the Owner and President. My children had been working with us during school vacations and after school hours through high school and college. My husband Richard came to work with us full time in the early '90s and has trained our son, Richie. Prior to the full time position Richard had worked in commercial construction but was always here using his vast knowledge to assist with repairs and updates to the vehicles. Together they manage our service and repair shop, install equipment, letter our vehicles and maintain and update our fleet. Both are certified by the Commonwealth as Taximeter technicians as is our son in law, David. Our oldest daughter, Joanna, graduated from Virginia Commonwealth University with every intention of becoming a teacher but started working with me full time to help out and is still here as our General Manager.

Our daughter, Monica started out as a dispatcher while attending Germana Community College but it now our Driver Manager. Our other daughter Renee recently completed her nursing degree and has begun nursing full time but still works here one day a week.

We like to think that the family relationship is extended to our staff and drivers. Every year we have a Christmas Party for our staff and every spring we have a Driver Appreciation Picnic for our Drivers. We try to hold this on a day when it will have little or no impact on our customers because obviously we cannot pull all the cabs at once.

The driver that got Corky started in the cab business, Vernon Havenner, came to drive here and stayed until he passed away in 2005 and his son still drives a Prince William Yellow Cab. We have drivers that have been with us for over 25 years and staff that has been with us for more than 12 years.

Vickers: When I met the Yellow Cab team, I could tell that your emphasis on providing handicap-accessible vehicles in greater Prince William was important to you. Between profit margins and expensive insurance premiums, why did you make that investment where others have not?

Beard: When we saw the overwhelming need for this type of service we knew that it was something we could offer, do it well and we would and could grow our customer base. Taxicabs transport customers with disabilities all the time, this is what we do and expanding the service to include accessible service seemed to be the next logical step.

I served as a member of the Transportation Options Group that was instrumental in developing a Mobility Management Plan for the County. At every meeting we would hear stories of overcharging, the unreliability and lack of accessible transportation service. We started to attend Council of Government meetings in the hopes that we could apply for a Grant to fund the addition of Accessible taxi service only to be told that there was not enough money to fund Capital purchases in the current Grant cycle. Knowing that if we waited for the next cycle we may again be left out in the cold we decided it was time to take the bull by the horns and just get it done.

We are happy to say that we were able to purchase the original four vehicles and two additional ones and place them in service. We were later invited back when additional Grant funds opened and we have applied for and been approved for funding to expand our Accessible Service to include four additional vehicles and expand our service area to the northern part of Stafford County.

Vickers: With a fleet of over 100 vehicles serving our area, what are a few fun facts about the number of miles traveled, frequent rides and facts that our readers wouldn't know about Yellow Cab PW?

Beard: We take people to work, grocery stores, medical appointments and airports to name a few destinations. We estimate that we traveled more than 2 million miles in 2012. We serviced more than 5,000 rides per week last year. Our every day customers are the ones that keep the wheels rolling. We offer standing orders (repeating reservations for service) to these customers as well as one time reservations or demand response calls. In addition to taxi service we also do package delivery, black car sedan service, corporate accounts, prescription delivery, etc.

We have taken passengers to Ontario, Canada, Birmingham Alabama, Atlantic City, New Jersey, Indianapolis, IN, Altoona, Pa., Virginia Beach, North Carolina, Florida, Georgia, New York, South Carolina, Maryland, and West Virginia to name some of our longer trips.

Vickers: You've mentioned that you are hiring for drivers. That's great news for qualified local residents searching for employment. What are you looking for in Yellow Cab Prince William drivers ?

Beard: Our drivers are all Independent Contractors. They work when they like and take off when they choose. There is no set schedule for drivers.

To become a driver you must:

- Be a licensed driver at least 21 years old
- Have a clean driving record. (No DUI, Reckless Driving, excessive point violations etc)
- Been licensed in the United States for at least 2 years
- Have a clean criminal record
- Pass a test on General Knowledge of the area, customer service, currency and map reading skills.

After you meet these requirements we will send you to the county to apply for a license to drive a cab. This license is \$75.00 and a temporary license will be issued while a back ground check is being processed. The driver must return within 30 days to take a county-issued test on regulations, map reading and general knowledge of the area.

Upon issuance of the temporary permit, a driver will begin training. Training covers customer service, use of the dispatch equipment, credit card processing, sensitivity training, and many other important skills needed to run your own business successfully. Continued training and educational meetings are held at least three times yearly.

Vickers: I always like to bring attention to businesses and organizations that maximize technology in their operations. How do you use new technology in your business?

Beard: We were the first company to be computer dispatched (1996) in Prince William County. We dispatched via private radio data network to Mobile Data Terminals with a voice radio channel for backup.

All vehicles were equipped with GPS to monitor location and status. In 2005 we upgraded to a public data network and began dispatching using NEXTEL cell phones. We still utilized our voice radio channel for backup and process credit cards by keyed entry in the vehicles. We also rolled out our very own online reservations page.

We began offering our own private label prepaid cab fare cards and Senior Ride Discount cards followed shortly afterward. By 2009, we had credit card swipes in every vehicle. In 2012, we did a complete system overhaul replacing our software, hardware, in vehicle hardware etc. The new system allows for efficient dispatching, trip scheduling, invoicing and billing, mapping & GPS turn by turn voice guided navigation as well as vehicle tracking. This is a system that will grow with us as the county grows!

We are the first cab company in Prince William County to use off-the-shelf Android products as in vehicle devices. Our new system includes a great customer interface that allows for Web reservations and mobile booking applications. Our new web reservations give you fare, mileage and trip time estimates when you make your reservations.

Our web interface allows us to assign account holders secure log ins to book their trips and track information on past and future trips. We also unveiled our new private label booking application. We are one of the first cab companies in Northern Virginia to have a private label booking application for Smart phones. This application allows you to book your cab, on demand or reservation, receive mileage, fare and trip time estimates and track the cab using GPS and display the vehicle on a map as the cab comes to pick you up. You also receive a notification when your cab has arrived. This application was designed specifically for us and is not mass marketed for other companies.

Potomac Local Leaders series are the stories and interviews with the men, women and youth that through their commitment to community change the world each day. Glenn Vickers is an experienced business professional enhancing philanthropic resource development, corporate citizenship programming and public private partnerships for social change. You can contact Vickers GOVickers@potomaclocal.com or Twitter [@GOVickers](https://twitter.com/GOVickers)