

The Wheels Are Turning for Rod and Sherri Monroe



Image by Steve Burwick

Fantasy Limo & Livery

By Steve Burwick

Fantasy Limo and Livery Service is rapidly expanding to meet a growing demand for limousine service in the area.

Rod and Sherri Monroe began offering horse and carriage rides in the year 2000, and bought their first limo, a white Lincoln Town Car 120-inch Stretch, the following summer. They began booking special events such as weddings, birthdays and proms, as well as business and personal transportation service.

"We started out with a horse and carriage, just something to do on weekends," says Rod. "It was something we didn't have in Kingsport."

It was a slow beginning, and the Monroes never expected that things would take off as they did.

"When we got started at the [Tri-Cities] airport, the limo business wasn't going the way I projected, so I went to MeadowView [Convention Center] and talked to [Director of Operations] Mark Eversole," Rod recalls. "He told me there was a demand for the business. They wanted somebody more professional than just a regular taxi service."

That's when the wheels began turning for the local entrepreneur with a southern drawl and a dream in his pocket.

"We started doing this at MeadowView, then when we came to the airport, people were impressed with how we were dressed," he says. "We came in with new ideas — new cars, new dress code, new stan-

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— Rod Monroe

dards for the business."

"I had to leave my job in the medical field," says Sherri. "It got larger faster than we knew it was going to. It made more sense for me to leave my job than for him to leave his."

"It's been nerve-racking," says Rod, who also drives a UPS truck. "We're going through the growing pains, still learning how to organize. It looks like I'm going to have to go full-time myself."

The current fleet consists of a six-passenger minivan, a black Lincoln Town Car Signature Series sedan, a six-passenger Ford Expedition, a black Town Car 85-inch Stretch six- to eight-passenger, and a Ford Excursion 200-inch Stretch 13- to 14-passenger, as well as the white Town Car. Services provided include color TV, stereo and bar.

"We started with one limo, and within the last year-and-a-half we expanded to the six that we have now," says Sherri.

They are planning to add a 13- to 14-passenger Town Car 160, along with a 30- to 35-passenger trolley bus and a 55-passenger tour bus.

"We got involved with the area chambers of commerce, and that made a big difference," says Rod.

"People come in that need transportation, and they see that we have nice cars and well-dressed people, and they're starting to recommend us."

In addition to regular vehicle inspections, the Monroes insist that their drivers dress and act professionally, and hold regular meetings to educate and train them.

"You want somebody there to leave a good impression," says Sherri. "You don't want to give an impression of poor service."

"We've got a variety of drivers," says Rod.

"For the different variety of clients," adds Sherri.

"The majority of our drivers are female. I know generally what kind of situation they're going to get into, so I know which person will best fit the situation. If we're going to have a bunch of wild guys going out partying till two or three in the morning, I wouldn't want to send any of my women drivers."

Along with three full-time employees and six who are part-time or on call, Rod sometimes has to fill in as a driver. He even finds himself in demand on occasion.

"Most people, when they call for a limo, will say, 'Can we get that guy that wears the black hat?'" says Rod. "The black cowboy hat and white gloves have become my trademark."

Rod and Sherri Monroe have taken a dream, added a few ideas, and, for Fantasy Limo and Livery Service, the wheels continue to turn. *B*