

SASK REPORT

SASKATCHEWAN'S MAGAZINE

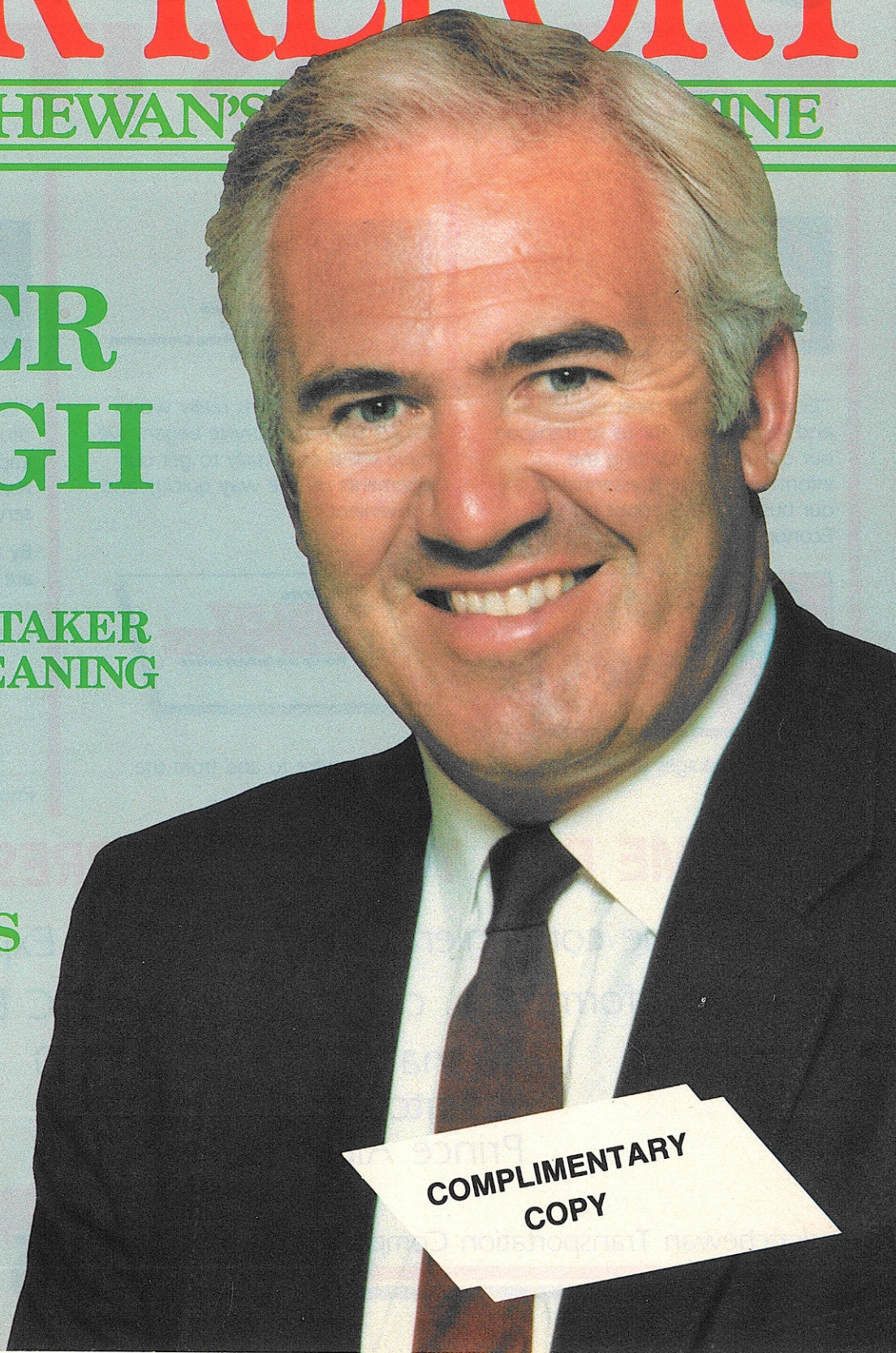
August, 1988

RIDER TOUGH

THE UNDERTAKER
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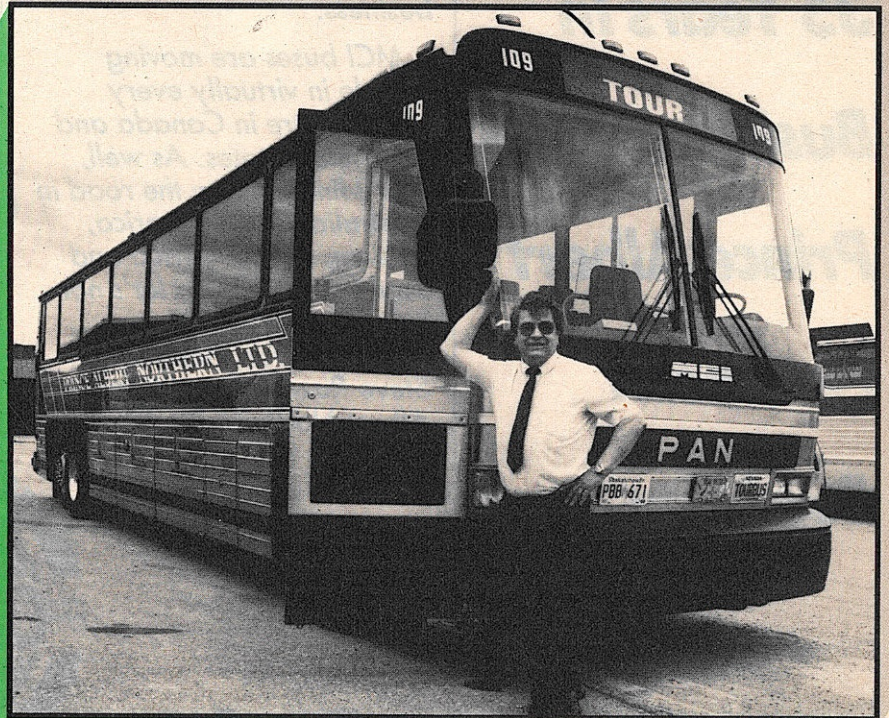
FEATURES

- P.A. BUS
- DALMENY
- ARTS & CULTURE



COMPLIMENTARY
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P.A. NORTHERN BUS LINES



GOING PLACES



A 35-Year Love Affair With A Bus

This is the nicest bus in Canada," says Steve Ruznisky, "glowing with pride, as he points out the features of his new \$250,000 bus. Outside, it is sleek, shiny and streamlined. Inside it reminds one of a top-flight aircraft, complete with state-of-the-art consul, overhead deck and tasteful upholstery. It also has strategically-placed TVs so passengers can enjoy total comfort and easy entertainment as they roll across the West.

After 35 years in the business, Steve Ruznisky, owner of P.A. Northern Bus Lines in Prince Albert can still feel all the delight and enthusiasm of a kid with a new toy — despite the fact this is his 92nd 'toy' — and that is the secret of his success.

It takes about five minutes to be caught up in this world of going places. City buses, school buses, highway buses, rental vans; if it's in P.A. it's Steve's. If it's within driving distance of P.A., it's also probably his.

And as you watch this man in operation, you realize he is totally in touch with every facet of the business every minute of the day. Anyone, from school boards to city bus riders who call get not a two-day call-back or a secretary, but Ruznisky in person. In fact, he doesn't have a full-time secretary. His daughter says people often phone and when she answers "P.A. Northern Bus Lines," they



Steve Ruznisky at work.

say, "Oh sorry, I wanted Steve's buses" and hang up.

"I've learned to say, 'P.A. Northern Bus Lines, Steve's buses'," she says. Ruznisky knows people by name, and takes time to listen to their concerns. He remembers their dog needed shots before they can even ask about buses. He makes every caller feel special. From the lost lunch pail to arranging a major charter across the states, each receives his equal attention.

And no matter what the exchange, he

always appears firm yet kind. To the person complaining because a bus is late — which Ruznisky says never happens — he says "Are you sure, or are you not a little bit early?" Or when someone calls to ask "When is the bus coming?" and says he is waiting "at home" or "at my aunt's," Ruznisky doesn't miss a beat. "What address is that?" he asks politely.

He says he never finds these conversations annoying, more often highly amusing and he doesn't waste much time on anger and frustration. He just does what needs to be done and always gives the client the benefit. "I work hard, I'm sincere in business with people. We've never had any competition in P.A. but I've made sure I've never taken advantage of that," he says. It is an honest, hands on, positive approach that has paid dividends.

The loyalty and goodwill this care has generated among his travelling public is also evident within his staff. Many of them have been with the company since it began. Thirty-five years and still happy is quite a recommendation for any workplace.

"I have expectations of people but I never expect my staff to do anything I won't do. We all work together," says Ruznisky. Not a day goes by that he does not fill in for a school bus trip, a spot of maintenance or as general go-for. Ninety-nine per cent of the time students are well behaved on the bus. But if a driver is having trouble, Ruznisky will say, "I'll take the run tonight" and sort it out.

Certificates of Appreciation Awarded Steve Ruznisky

- Chamber of Commerce, Prince Albert Life Membership Award, October, 1987
- Youth Appreciation Week, 1985 (High Noon Optimist)
- Municipal Airport Disaster Exercise Appreciation Certificate, September 1987 (Transport Canada — Air Division)
- #390 Army Cadets 1983-84 (Militia)
- Telemiracle Certificate of Appreciation, March 1983
- Royal Canadian Legion #2 Branch, Saskatchewan Command, 1980
- Canadian National Institute for the Blind, March 1976
- Province of Saskatchewan (Office of the Premier), December 1976
- Roughrider Supporter Appreciation Certificate, 1976
- Association for the Handicapped, 1984
- Senior Citizens, Prince Albert, 1985
- Prince Albert Boys' Choir, 1987, certificate in recognition of outstanding and valuable service
- Air League of Canada (Nipawin) 1988, certification of appreciation
- Appreciation for sponsorship of Student Encounters in Canada, 1987
- Citizen of the Year Nominee



Bill Picot, a company employee for 29 years, says Ruznisky is "a friend as well as a boss. He's very tough physically and mentally — and very fair. And whether it's hockey or business, he excels in strategy."

Shop foreman John Nemish, has been there since the beginning "doing everything" from driving to maintenance. "This is an everything kind of place," he says. "With Steve and I it's a matter of mutual consideration. He gives me time in the spring and fall to farm and I work after hours whenever he needs me."

This consideration is also very much in evidence on a family level. "Dad has always supported and encouraged everything we've wanted to do," says Sonja, the second of three daughters and a doctor of psychology. She says the first word the girls learned from their mother was "Mum-my". The first word from dad was "Un-i-ver-si-ty." Sandra, the eldest, is a teacher and Jackie the youngest, is a pharmacist with her own business in



A fleet of P.A. Northern School buses, August 1966.

now, he wakes up at five and wishes the business day would start. He wishes the post office were open all night so that he could get a jump on the mail. He has phoned me at six in the morning and said, 'What are you doing, Sonja?' and I say, 'Sleeping, dad!'

What makes Steve and Sonja a good team is their flexibility. "We call this the half-hour business," says Sonja. "At any minute you could be doing accounts, washing a vehicle, fueling, driving a bus or doing maintenance. You've got to be highly flexible — able to roll with it. What could look disorganized actually works around here.

"And dad's always the kingpin," she says with pride, "He's got everything in hand and he's all things to all men. He can discuss business with lawyers, bankers and school superintendents or talk to a Grade 2 student on a bus with equal ease. We do a lot of northern work and he's so in tune with the native population that they often call and ask for Indian Steve."

With three girls and not a son in sight, dad has to be prepared for a little teasing. "Poor dad. He has a male-oriented business and he's mad about hockey and he's got three daughters who can't skate," Sonja laughs. Then Jackie and Sonja tell the story of the time they all went to a hockey game with their dad and the coach of the other team said to Steve,

"Where are your sons?" and he said, "At camp."

"He'd never trade us. That's why we think it's funny," says Sonja. And Jackie tells her story of the time she filled in driving school bus during the break be-

"Steve is an excellent businessman but beyond that he is a community man. He is devoted to the city and its people; the kind of person who is mentioned for Citizen of the Year and whose name comes up for all civic honors. Above all, he is liked. He's an awfully friendly, popular man."

**Mayor Dick Spencer,
Prince Albert**

"All I can say is, 'Duja dobra'. That's 'very good' in Ukrainian. Steve's an old softie. Ask for a little help and he gives you the whole bus. He should have been Citizen of the Year 25 years ago. He's done it over and over again, and we love him."


**Jack Cannon,
CKBI Radio Station,
Prince Albert**

Prince Albert. "Dad has never pressured us to get into the family business," says Sonja.

With similar support, Sonja has for the past eight years, worked half-time in her father's business and as a clinical psychologist in Prince Albert. Together Steve and Sonja are a powerhouse of positive energy.

"Dad has an uncanny ability to draw you into and up to his energy level the minute you walk in," says Sonja. "Even

tween Christmas and intercession. She later phoned, disguised her voice and asked Steve what happened to the girl who had been driving the bus. "Oh that's my daughter. She's at university, you know," he said proudly and proceeded to say how wonderful she was. He swears he knew it was Jackie, but the girls don't believe him.



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Jackie has often driven bus and even had a chauffeur's licence at 18 to drive the highway buses with air brakes. "I was the last chance kid," she says "so I had to be most like a boy." So she went to all the hockey and football games with Steve, got hooked on sports, and is the current Zone Chairman for the Saskatchewan Roughriders. "I am a great spectator and supporter," she says. For this year's Father's Day the girls are taking Steve to the Grey Cup. Last year they treated him to the Kentucky Derby.

"My girls have always been good to me. I have supported them and they have supported me," says Steve.

"Dad's apron strings are elastic. They stretch around three buses," says Sonja.

The mutual appreciation in this family is apparent. As a clinical psychologist, Sonja also has a professional edge in assessing her father. "Memory is one of the most significant tests of IQ and my father has an incredible memory. And just as one exercises the body to keep it fit, so the mind must be exercised to keep it sharp. Dad has always purposely tested his memory. For example, writing up schedules for a week from memory and then checking them. He can figure out company data as quickly as a computer. He's amazing."

The Prince Albert community think Steve is pretty amazing too. "You ask for a little help and he gives you the whole

bus," says Jack Cennon, long-time radio man at CKBI. And that just about sums it up.

Ruznisky has always been a leader in community sports and did much to establish junior hockey in P.A. He was man-

◆

"He's a tireless worker. He doesn't know what tired is. He has a heart of gold and a great concern for young people. He's always giving breaks to teams who need to go somewhere. With two sons who have been in hockey and being V.P. of a school I've always been around Steve getting buses. And he's always happy. He's a people person."

**Lou Hobson,
High School Vice Principal,
Prince Albert**

◆

ager of the P.A. Minto Junior Hockey team from 1950 and team owner from 1960 until the rink was lost in a fire. He coached the Kinsmen Bantams to a hockey championship and has coached Little League ball to championships. His

energy and enthusiasm have nurtured a love for sports in young people for decades.

His financial help has also always been readily offered as Ruznisky and P.A. Northern Bus Lines sponsor the Prince Albert soccer team and the Minto Purolator Cup hockey team. He also sponsors scholarships and awards in Prince Albert such as the St. Mary Student Academic Award and Student East Excursion. He donated banquet support for the Olympic Torch Ceremony and received a Government of Canada medal of thanks.

And whenever he is needed for a sporting or excursion event, Ruznisky has been generous. His donations of buses and drivers have included transportation to the Steve Fonyo ceremony at the Communiplex, the Governor General ceremony at Kinsmen Park, annual picnics for Kinsmen School students and numerous school games, events and outings. The minute he heard of the tragic accident involving the Swift Current Broncos one of his buses was on its way.

Business, family and community — together they are the mosaic that makes up Steve Ruznisky's colorful, busy life. And he represents what Prince Albert is: big city service alongside small-town friendliness and caring.

Heather Sterling

Sterling is a Saskatoon-based freelance writer.



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P.A. BUS LINES

A Special P.A. Touch

Sam Tadman first met Steve Ruznisky when as a young man he joined the school football team. Ruznisky had come in from the country to go to high school and didn't know anything about football but before long Sam was giving him the ball every time. Ruznisky ended up with black eyes and a broken nose and finally

asked "Why am I carrying the ball every time?" Tadman replied, "If I've got a bull I'm going to use him."

And that, says Tadman, sums up Steve. "He's got the most stubborn, proud nature and the ability to kill himself working and that has been the secret of his success. He still works a seven-day week and if he leaves a social event at midnight, he will drive over and check out the place before he goes home."

The two have been friends ever since

school days — holidaying together, in Kinsmen together, in minor hockey together.

"We've done everything together. Steve's got a great sense of humour and he's good-hearted. But one thing I learned early on is that he can't stand to lose. Once we had a 50-cent bet on a football team and he lost. He was so mad he refused to ever bet with me again. The word lose is not in that man's vocabulary."

◆

"In Prince Albert, virtually every charitable social organization has been a recipient of his largesse in one form or another, over the years. My greatest wonderment is that he has not yet been Citizen of the Year. I don't know of any other person who has contributed so widely to the people of Prince Albert."

Jim Sanderson,
Lawyer,
Prince Albert

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"If he wasn't a good man I wouldn't have been here for 34 years. Steve would go to the wall for you."

John Nemish,
shop foreman at
P.A. Northern Bus Lines

◆

"Steve is one of the most generous individuals I know; not only with equipment but with his time, to the people of Prince Albert and the business community. He's a good businessman and a fine supporter of the Chamber and the city."

George Rimmer,
Chamber of Commerce,
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◆

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Still Going Places

At a time when most people are thinking of retiring, Steve Ruznisky is still gearing up for new and major business moves.

He has just purchased two state-of-the-art, \$250,000 highway buses and has two more on order. His entire fleet of 92 vehicles includes 12 city buses, 13 highway, 45 school buses, 20 rental vans and two maintenance vehicles. "Don't leave the keys in your car or dad will rent that too," jokes his daughter Sonja.

After he purchased the first \$250,000 bus, his rationale for ordering three more was the super bus reduced him to a one-bus system because everyone asked for 'the TV bus,' although the oldest bus on the fleet is only a 1983. He owns \$3 million in new equipment alone.

He has also recently bought the entire alley behind his property and next summer will construct a sophisticated, automatic bus wash to provide maximum efficiency and traffic flow for his operation.

It seems the drive that propelled him through the struggle of the first 20 years of business established a mind set and energy that will not quit.

"A big part of my success has been my ability to hang in," says Steve. "Mine

wasn't an overnight success story. It began with a 20-year struggle. But I always saw the light at the end of the tunnel and knew that with careful planning, financing and banking I'd make it."

Ruznisky has always been an achiever against the odds. When he finished high school in 1941 as an honors student and the only student ever to have won the Roy Phillips Trophy for senior track two years in a row, he should have been on his way to university. Instead he was called to war, graduated as a pilot and was posted overseas. But he and several top Canadian pilots were recalled two days later, and promoted to be instructors in the Royal Canadian Air Force. They replaced the American instructors who had all been called to active service when Japan entered the war.

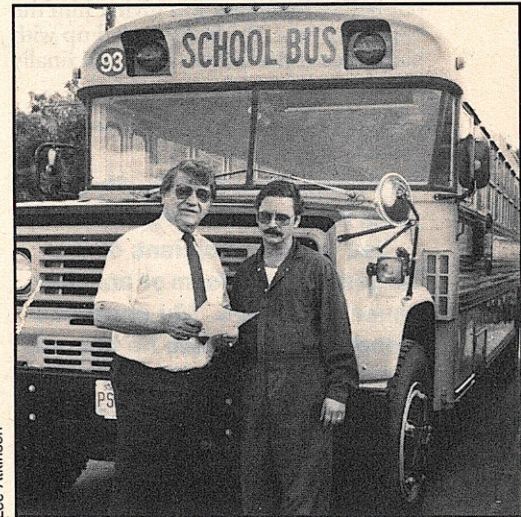
For the next three and a half years he trained pilots in Trenton, Ont., Yorkton and Brandon.

Ruznisky returned to Prince Albert after the war and entered private business with family members in New Windsor Grocery on Central Avenue. In 1953, he bought Prince Albert and Northern Bus Lines Ltd. with his older brother Maurice and brother-in-law, Walter Hollick. Maurice is still involved in the busi-

ness. Walter passed away in December, 1987.

Steve, Maurice and Walter used to brag they had seven buses, but they could only afford to license five. One broke down and then there were four.

The city bus service established with this tenuous beginning is now one of the most efficient and only remaining private city bus service in Canada. But until an urban grant was offered in 1977, the going was tough. The P.A. city service is



Ruznisky with Jerry Johnson, asst. maintenance foreman.

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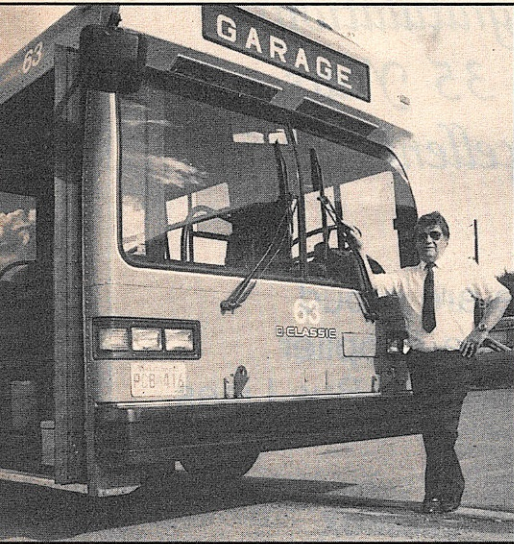


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Lee Atkinson

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The school bus arm of the business started in the late sixties. Three-year contracts offered stability and steady cash flow. Steve's school buses can now be found from the east to the west boundary of Saskatchewan and as far north as the Northern Lights School System. P.A. Bus Lines transports hundreds of school children every school day with a long

history of dependability and safety.

P.A. is a hockey town and charter buses are always in demand. "We catch most of the busing business for all areas around. It's a good market because of hockey," says Ruznisky. And when hockey finishes, fishing trips and school field trips begin. "Apart from being sick of going to Batoche, I've got no complaints," he laughs. The company's passenger vans are also rented for smaller groups and only require a regular driving licence.

The charter service has I.C.C. (Interstate Commerce Commission) rights which means it is highly licenced, massively insured and strictly regulated. This status took some years to achieve and among the commission's criteria is the requirement drivers have a flawless driving record for five years. This has opened up the whole of North America for charter business.

And so the business expands year after year and new challenges and exciting possibilities present themselves. "I guess I should be thinking of retiring,

"Steve has always been especially aware of the needs of those less fortunate and has always been generous with Kinsmen and Telemiracle. And whenever we've used his buses for ball, he's always given us a better shake. He's always there if you need him. He's a very community-minded man."

**Doug Funk,
Tournament Director of
1988 7th Men's World
Softball Championship**

but I'm enjoying myself too much," he says.

Why would a man want to quit when he is still going places?

Heather Sterling

STEVE'S FAVORITES

- Football — Saskatchewan Roughriders
- Baseball — Montreal Expos
- Hockey — P.A. Raiders (of course!) and Stanley Cup champs, the Oilers.

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