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accommodates  
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## SCR Medical Transportation accomodates mobility with AbiliTrax

Pamela and Stanley Rakestraw founded SCR Medical Transportation in 1986, with a mission to provide trips to Chicago's mobility-challenged riders and become a leader in paratransit transportation. Their operation has grown to include more than 1,200 employees and 500 vehicles, and strives to impress customers with a reliable, safe, clean and comfortable transit experience. >>

*Keven Crawford, (L) managing partner at AbiliTrax, poses with fleet customers Stanley Rakestraw, VP and COO of SCR, and Pamela Rakestraw, president and CEO of SCR, located in Chicago, Illinois.*



SCR is essential for connecting passengers to friends, family and medical-based services. As a result, the Rakestraws select drivers and staff that express a desire to help people care for themselves. Driver outreach is crucial, said Justin Rakestraw, vice president of business process improvement at SCR and son of Pamela and Stanley. An ideal paratransit driver for SCR intuitively understands how to effectively and safely transport clients dealing with a variety of issues.

“The primary challenges in paratransit industry haven’t really changed since we founded SCR,” he said. “There is still a need for adequate vehicle operators, well-trained staff and managers, and well-maintained vehicles. These are the most precious resources in our industry, and we are constantly looking for ways to improve at all times.”

### A vision for mobility

SCR’s success over the years, the Rakestraws said, has been in large part due to the company’s dedicated employees, but also because of a desire to remain innovative. This means making sure SCR has the very best mobility equipment available for its passengers.

For much of its history, virtually all the vehicles in SCR’s fleet have been comprised primarily of structurally-modified low-floor minivans as well as a few body-on-chassis buses. While the company has had success with these minivans, they do have limitations – notably, they are very limited by side-door opening dimensions when it comes comfortably accommodating larger bariatric wheelchairs. Bariatric wheelchairs are a rapidly growing segment in wheelchair transport. Once a bariatric wheelchair is properly secured inside a lowered floor minivan, Pamela said, then there’s virtually no extra room for any other passengers in the rear of the minivan.

“Consequently, our operational efficiencies and passenger flexibility can at times become challenging due to the limited space inside these modified minivans, and the low ceilings can also be challenging for drivers working to secure passengers with wheelchairs,” she said.

### Enter AbiliTrax

Justin Rakestraw and his brother London spent a lot of time researching ways to possibly enhance the company’s service, increasing mobility for passengers and drivers. They were ultimately instrumental in connecting SCR Medical Transportation with the team at AbiliTrax.

AbiliTrax is a unique modular flooring platform that features a versatile “X” track system, allowing vehicle capabilities to



The SCR management team uses state-of-the-art fleet monitoring systems that allow them to track their paratransit fleet’s performance in real-time.



Pamela Rakestraw is very active in the company’s training and safety programs.

change as quickly as an operator’s needs. The “X” track is a rail that will accept both “L” and “A” style fittings and is the building block for AbiliTrax. Featured components include Step-N-Lock seats, CamLock seats, lift installation kit, and stretcher bracket. The AbiliTrax platform includes systems for the Ford Transit, Mercedes Sprinter, Chevrolet Express, and Ram ProMaster.

“Mobility” is a concept bred into the figurative DNA at AbiliTrax and Fenton Mobility.

The AbiliTrax product line was invented and founded by Scott Fenton and his family. Knowing that the AbiliTrax product line

was an innovative approach to advancing a better paratransit experience, Scott reached out to Keven Crawford about four years ago to join his team as a managing partner to assist him in launching his innovative product line. Crawford is known for his successful tenure at BraunAbility, which spanned almost 20 years. Keven’s father loaned money to Ralph Braun in the early 1970s, and as a teenager Keven would assemble Braun’s first product, called the Tri-Wheeler, in Ralph Braun’s father’s garage.

“I was very aware of Keven’s business development experiences while at BraunAbility, most specifically his





With the AbiliTrax Shift N Step system, the paratransit operator can now use the safer curbside location for both wheelchair and ambulatory access.

leadership in patent protection and overall product distribution. And we've already received several patents on various designs within our product line, and have several more in the patent pending stage," Fenton said.

Fenton, the president at Fenton Mobility and AbiliTrax, is a second-generation member of his family's mobility company and is the lead designer of the AbiliTrax product line. His father and mother, Richard and Sharon Fenton, started the company as an auto-service business before focusing entirely on vehicle mobility conversions, and his twin brother Sean runs Access Elevator and Lift, a sister company of Fenton Mobility.

"All of us at AbiliTrax are of course very happy and appreciative that subcontracting paratransit companies like SCR are benefiting from the flexibility designed into our product line," Crawford added. "We are also seeing numerous state DOT paratransit bids calling out our spec's, along with numerous transit agencies across the country. Not to mention other FTA certified TVM upfitters like NorCal, MTS, Sunset Vans, and others, installing our product line for their paratransit upfitting bid work as well."

### Realizing results

In 2017, at Justin and London's urging, SCR Medical Transportation added 15 Ford Transit vans, upfitted with AbiliTrax products, to its fleet. AbiliTrax sent their highly skilled technicians to SCR's Chicago facility to provide its mechanics with hands-on training.

The company quickly began to realize the benefits Justin predicted would come to fruition.

Firstly, the new mobility system gave dispatchers much more flexibility in meeting the hour to hour needs of SCR customers. The AbiliTrax mobility system, which bolts into the Ford Transit 350 van with no structural modifications required, allows SCR to not only comfortably transport more than one wheelchair, including bariatrics, but at the same time ambulatory and semi-ambulatory passengers as well, all through the same curbside slide door.

Pamela Rakestraw added that the mobility of the Ford Transit is exceptional.

"Believe me, here in the greater Chicago region we have some very crowded and narrow roads to negotiate - and body-on-chassis buses can be a handful for those very challenging conditions," she said. "Our drivers love these Ford Transits - they love the van's ease of driving and the extra room they have in the back for securing the wheelchairs."

She added that SCR's passengers love the exceptional visibility and comfort the Ford Transit van and AbiliTrax system provide, as well.

"Our drivers at SCR Medical Transportation, praise the vehicles' drivability and the Shift-N-Step's ease of use, and unlike our low-floor minivans, we have no bottoming out issues at all with the Ford Transit," said Justin Rakestraw. "Furthermore, with our cold Chicago winters, the special heating vents strategically located throughout the AbiliTrax floor is loved by both our customers and drivers. Suffice it to say, our flexibility, comfort, safety, and efficiencies are much better with the Shift-N-Step AbiliTrax system, not to mention having happier drivers due to all that extra maneuvering room - including the ability for our drivers to stand upright while inside the van, something they can't often do with the minivans. And the real "game-changer" is the Shift-N-Step's side slide-door dual-access system. Drivers now can access the safer curbside location for both wheelchair passengers and ambulatory passengers - a first in the mobility transport industry."

The Shift-N-Step is fully FMVSS 404 compliant and works with both the BraunAbility and Ricon wheelchair lift systems. From a safety evacuation position, with the Shift-N-Step positioned



rearward during transport, there is always an emergency evacuation opening available to all passengers at the side-door opening.

The AbiliTrax floor also helps SCR keep vehicle floor environments much cleaner during the day, as it allows floor debris to fall into the slotted areas. At the end of the day, cleaning crews simply vacuum the slots.

Drivers also like that by simply using their foot, the AbiliTrax seating design allows for hands-free latching and unlatching of the removable seat bases. This reduces significant bending and kneeling, and decreases the risk of the driver's knees or hands coming into contact with floor surfaces.

"As we compared the AbiliTrax system to other flooring systems in the market, we quickly saw that the other systems often require the driver to actually get down on their knees and reach under the seat to engage and disengage seat release mechanisms," Stanley Rakestraw said. "Drivers have enough challenges securing the various mobility devices each trip, and the AbiliTrax system actually gives our drivers a more comfortable environment in which to work."


### **Moving forward, safely**

Justin Rakestraw said that operators are well aware of the potential exposure to liquidated damages that agencies impose to regulate service performance under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). In some cases, agencies may impose fines based on the productivity of a fleet throughout the course of a day or month, so it becomes imperative to carefully align route structure with demand.

In the cases where providers like SCR Medical Transportation perform thousands of ADA trips per day, every seat matters in terms of efficiency and limiting the exposure to liquidated damages. Rakestraw said that AbiliTrax really shows its worth in these cases.

"Finally, we have more flexibility over vehicle configurations that best match our trip demands and allow us to maximize our productivity," he said. "If we can essentially adjust our overall vehicle capacity while comfortably and safely transporting our clients all to meet the agencies' goals and objectives, then we are truly acting as a partner to provide superior ADA service to our community."

Just as SCR prioritizes training and continuing education for its employees in order to provide safe and reliable transportation services, the same holds true in operating the best vehicle equipment. Part of the purchasing decision-making process, Stanley Rakestraw said, is ensuring SCR's suppliers have the products and industry experience to properly support them.

"With the AbiliTrax team, I not only get state-of-the-art products, but also seasoned experience and support that's really second to none in this industry," he said. "In my more than 30 years in this specialized industry, I've never experienced the high level of after-sale service that AbiliTrax provides. They truly have 'game changer' mobility products, supported with that good old-fashioned service." 



*AbiliTrax provides drivers with a much more user-friendly environment when they are changing seating configurations. By the driver simply using their foot, AbiliTrax allows for "hands free" latching and unlatching of the "Step-N-Lock" seat base.*