

BLUE RIDGE LIMOUSINE — where every client is a VIP



photo by mario morgado

▲ Asheville is becoming an increasingly popular destination wedding spot, and Blue Ridge Limousine excels at transporting wedding parties in comfort and style. This Lincoln Town Car stretch can hold up to ten passengers. It features red carpet service, crystalware, lighted coolers, fiber optics, custom walnut accent trims, mirrored privacy divider, flat-screen monitors, DVD player, premium sound system with CD player, and the coldest A/C in the South.

Since it was established in 2003, Blue Ridge Limousine has become one of Asheville's most successful ground transportation companies. But you won't find founder and CEO Gilbert Santiago resting on his laurels any time soon. Customer service, he believes, is an ongoing commitment. Whether transporting an Arab sheik who tips in Rolex watches or a high school junior attending her first prom, each client is provided nothing less than a first-class experience.

Born and raised in New York City, Santiago arrived in Asheville in 1994 via South Beach, where he honed his skills in service-oriented industries such as firefighting, ground transportation, and restaurant management. One day, a friend living in Asheville called to ask for Santiago's help in opening a restaurant. Within weeks, he'd found his new home.

"I had the same feeling about Asheville I had about South Beach," he says. "It was just a matter of time before people discovered what a great place it is. I knew there would eventually be a market in this town for what I wanted to do."

Having learned the ins and outs of first-class ground transportation service in Miami, Santiago wanted to bring to Asheville a superior car service company geared toward an upscale market but at competitive prices. With no advertising except word-of-mouth, he grew his business from one sedan to a fleet of seven, including a Mercedes Van that runs on biodiesel, thus becoming the region's first eco-friendly limousine/transportation company. Blue Ridge has since emerged as the preferred choice for visitors and businesspeople throughout Western North Carolina.

"The recipe for success is pretty simple," says Santiago. "First of all, clients want a company that shows up on time.

And that means fifteen minutes early. They also want a clean car and a courteous, knowledgeable driver."

Santiago doesn't necessarily hire drivers with previous limousine experience. "I would much rather hire someone with a service background and convert those skills into those of a chauffeur. We like to say that our clients experience the kind of service found at a fine dining establishment. Only instead of dinner, we serve them a first-class transportation experience."

Because Blue Ridge caters to a large number of corporate and upscale clientele, attention to detail is a must. The company keeps meticulous records of its regular clients' likes and dislikes and special dates such as birthdays and anniversaries. It does extensive research on new clients while keeping in mind that discretion and privacy are of the highest priority. Drivers also stay up-to-date on whatever is going on in both Asheville and throughout the region.

While still growing his own business, Santiago is also mindful to contribute to the community that's brought him so much success. He gives back in some way at least once a week, and is especially devoted to children's and school-related initiatives.

"Our goal is to serve our clients at every point in their lives—as newborns going home from the hospital, when they go to prom, when they graduate college, when they get married," Santiago says. "We're a company that looks to the future. Our relationships are for the long term." ❖



photo by mario morgado

▲ Owner Gilbert Santiago's diverse fleet of vehicles accommodates a wide variety of client needs, with a biodiesel van perfect for large parties, elegant stretch limos for once-in-a-lifetime occasions, and luxury sedans that provide business clients the ultimate in comfort and reliability.

Blue Ridge has since emerged as the preferred choice for visitors and businesspeople throughout Western North Carolina.