



Jim Price and wife Willene ("Willi") aboard the colourful new Dawg House bus the family owns and operates as part of the Gentleman Jim's/Vancouver Party Bus fleet of vehicles, based in the Port Kells area of Surrey. PHOTO/Sharon Doucette

now
Living

On the party buses

PORT KELLS/ Family has fun in safety-first business of group transportation

When the Dawg House rolls, people howl.

Tom ZILlich
Staff reporter

"This (party) bus really gets people talking when we bring it out in public — they love it," Shelley Harrison said as she surveys the latest vehicle put into service by her family's business.

The Dawg House is a colourful creature, with facing rows of leather seats, flashing lights, a killer sound system, mirrors, a pair of dance poles and red "dog collar" safety handles bolted to the ceiling. All in, the refurbishing job was a \$65,000 bone for this Dawg.

Harrison manages the office of Gentleman Jim's limo service, which also does business as Vancouver Party Bus, headquartered at a tree-lined compound in the Port Kells area of Surrey.

It's a full-on family affair at the transporta-

tion company, with Harrison's mom and dad, Jim and Willene (aka "Willi") Price, running the show and her brother, Dan Price, the head mechanic and vehicle designer.

"Our drivers, everyone here, is part of the family, too," said Willene.

With a fleet of close to two dozen vehicles, Gentleman Jim's is the largest independent limo company in Canada's western provinces. On busy weekend nights, it can haul up to 1,500 people around the Lower Mainland — mostly for birthdays, weddings and other special events, but also for casino trips, concerts and stag/stagette parties.

The business rolled to life in the mid-1990s with a single limo Jim Price drove while living in a trailer park in South Surrey. His days of being a drug-and-alcohol counsellor were drawing to a close, and he was looking for

other ways to make a decent living.

"I'd go out 24/7 in that limo — three in the morning, it didn't matter," he told the *Noz*.

"We got a second (limo) and fixed it up — when everybody else told us it couldn't be fixed — and it just grew from there."

Gentleman Jim's later moved north to its current Surrey location, with party buses added to the fleet.

"One of the drivers came up with the idea of putting in row seating, facing each other.... It's a group dynamic at work that way, because it's designed for interaction among people. We looked into the regulations and, yeah, we could do that. We got into blinging up the buses after that. The theme-bus market is a target for us."

There's Cherry Bomb, Rolling Thunder and **see page 20 >**

LIVING

'What happens on the bus, stays on the bus'

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Big Kahuna, with Yellow Submarine in the works.

Oldest is the Raptor — the "dinosaur" of the bus fleet, said Dan. "We like to experiment with the designs, have some fun with them," he added.

Before it became the Dawg House, the bus transported members of the African Children's Choir to cities and towns around North America.

"The energy in this bus was absolutely phenomenal. I guess from hauling all those kids around," said Jim. "We've built on that and took it in another direction."

On the buses, Rishi Sharma is the chief party-starting event host and entertainer, mostly for groups of teens and young adults.

"It's a lot of birthdays, grad nights and things, to get the energy going. With the kids, the main thing is

for them to have a good time in a safe environment."

"We're parents," Dan underlined, "and we understand that with the younger crowds, mom and dad want to make sure their kids are safe.

We bring that philosophy into it, safety. It's the most important thing."

Rock bands Loverboy and Nickelback, and starlet Pamela Anderson, have called on Gentleman Jim's for limo service.

"With Nickelback," said Jim, "we started with them back when I was the driver on my own. They're just party guys, love to party. They give us good references, too, for other people."

But anecdotal stories about wild times in the limo/party bus aren't easy to pry from the Prices.

"What happens on the bus, stays on the bus," said Dan with a laugh.

"We hear the stories from the drivers after every weekend," said Shelley, "but mostly it's people phoning us to say what a great time they've had, nothing too crazy."

■ For an image gallery of Gentleman Jim's party buses, click on www.vancouverpartybus.com.

