



# PITTSBURGH WATER LIMO

## Navigating Game Days in Style, and More

By Jennifer Brozak

**W**hen Mark Schiller started his water-taxi business in 1999, it was a matter of navigating the right waters at the right time. Coming from a family of entrepreneurs, Schiller has always dreamt of opening a restaurant on a river in Pittsburgh. That dream came to fruition in 1997 when he opened Trolls—now RedFin Blues—on Washington’s Landing. After about two years of running the restaurant, however, he started to get “itchy” when he thought about the untapped potential that existed on Pittsburgh’s waterways.


“Being on the river, I started to realize that we weren’t taking advantage of what we had,” says Schiller, 52, who has since left the restaurant business. “I started to think about other ways we could use the riverfront.”

One day, a man named Merle Crouse walked into Trolls and wanted to know who owned the marina. When Schiller asked why he wanted to know, Crouse informed him that he wanted to start a water-taxi service on the Allegheny.

“The timing was right, because for years I had been thinking the same exact thing,” says Schiller, a Penn Hills native who lives in Franklin Park.

Shortly after sitting down for a lunch meeting, they launched their water-taxi business: Pittsburgh Cruise Lines, now known as Pittsburgh Water Limo and Luxury Cruises.

The company’s first vessel was *Miss Pittsburgh*, a 39-passenger riverboat that shuttles eager sports fans across the water to Heinz Field or PNC Park. Since its inception, the company has always docked its boats at the former South Shore Marina at 23rd Street in the Strip District because of its proximity to the stadiums and riverfront attractions. Initially, game-day shuttles originated from the Mon Wharf, but that marina was eventually closed for repairs, necessitating a move for passengers to board at the Sixth Street Bridge. When new owners took over the South Shore Marina circa 2005, Schiller and Crouse were given the

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opportunity to start running shuttles from the revamped dock, which is now known as the Lock Wall One Marina.

“It was the best move we ever could have made,” says Schiller of the marina, which sits right next to the Cork Factory. “It’s much more accessible for our passengers, and it’s allowed our business to expand considerably.”

In 2009, Schiller and Crouse added a two-level yacht, *Fantasy*, to its fleet. Transporting the luxury boat 3,500 miles to Pittsburgh from its home base in New York, though, was no easy feat. It took two months, a close call with the outskirts of a hurricane, and the assistance of friends and family members who flew in and out of ports along the way. Schiller, who serves as vice president of operations, was the only one who stayed with the yacht during the entire trip home to Pittsburgh, calling the journey a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

Schiller says that the water-taxi service eliminates the cost and hassle of traffic and parking on the North Shore during sporting events. For Steelers games, *Miss Pittsburgh* picks fans up at the Lock Wall One Marina about three hours before the game begins and then drops passengers off at the waterside Gate A entrance to Heinz Field. The final return shuttle to the Lock Wall One Marina takes place about one hour after the fourth quarter ends. The cost for adults is \$15 for a round-trip ticket (children under 10 are \$8) or \$8 one way. Alcoholic beverages are available on the boat until halftime; beer is \$3 and mixed drinks and wine cost \$5. Advanced reservations for this cruise are required.

Then, starting two and a half hours before kickoff, *Miss Pittsburgh* also shuttles fans back and forth from Sixth Street downtown to Heinz Field. Return trips begin during the third quarter and continue for an hour following the end of the game. The trip takes approximately eight minutes and costs \$8 round trip or \$5 for a one-way ride. The shuttle is on a first-come, first-serve basis and there are no advanced reservations required.


For Pirates games, *Miss Pittsburgh* shuttles guests from the Lock Wall One Marina to PNC Park every half hour starting about 65 minutes before the game, with return trips beginning during the seventh-inning stretch and continuing until 15 minutes after the end of the game. *Miss Pittsburgh* will wait for extra innings, game delays, or fireworks to ensure riders are shuttled back.



Fans who are looking for a more luxurious game-day experience can reserve a spot on the *Fantasy* for a Steelers Sailgate Party, which includes an all-you-can-eat buffet, three alcoholic drink tickets per person, and an autograph session with a Steelers legend. The cost is \$85 per adult, \$70 for children 10 to 16 years old, and \$60 for children under the age of 10. The yacht holds up to 110 passengers and features two bars, two bathrooms, a flat-screen TV, dance floor, and state-of-the-art sound system.

“The *Fantasy* is arguably the nicest commercial boat in Pittsburgh,” says Schiller. The yacht can be booked for private parties such as rehearsal dinners, weddings, and holiday celebrations. A two-hour minimum is required, and there is no maximum. One client in particular, he says, booked the yacht for a three-day, 110-mile journey into West Virginia.

“If you’re willing to pay for it, we’re willing to get you there,” says Schiller with a laugh. “But once you reserve the yacht, it’s yours. We’re going to cater to you. If you’re going to have a party on the river, you should do it with us.”

Pittsburgh Water Limo has full Coast Guard certification and an experienced, four-captain team. For more information or to book a cruise, visit [www.pittsburghwaterlimo.com](http://www.pittsburghwaterlimo.com) or call 412-221-LIMO (5466). 

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