



NEW YORK CITY TAXI & LIMOUSINE COMMISSION

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TLC BIDS A FOND FAREWELL TO THE LAST NEW YORK CITY CHECKER CAB

The New York City Taxi and Limousine Commission (TLC) today bid a fond farewell to cab #1N11, the last Checker cab in operation in the City of New York, with a celebratory event held appropriately in Times Square -- the Crossroads of the World. The occasion was celebrated, among other things, with a giant Checker Cab-themed cheesecake created by the world-famous Junior's Restaurant for the occasion. Participating in the event were TLC Chairperson/Commissioner Diane McGrath-McKechnie, cab #1N11 co-owner/driver Earl Johnson, and his fellow Checker owner Johann Struna, who holds the distinction of being the *next-to-last* Checker cab driver until his vehicle's retirement in December, 1998.

"This is an historic day for New York City," said Commissioner McKechnie, "in that it will be the first time in many decades that New York City will be without at least one of its famed Checker cabs on the road serving the riding public. That being the case, we thought it was appropriate to send the Checker out in style with a proper goodbye. We also wished to congratulate the last two owners and driver for sticking it out all these years when it was clearly a challenge to keep them on the road for as long as they did."

Aside from the ceremonial cutting of the one-of-a-kind Junior's cheesecake, the event featured awards presentations from Commissioner McKechnie and David Pollack, who represented the League of Mutual Taxi Owners.

Cab #1N11, a 1978 vintage model Checker, was retired as of July 26, 1999 due to safety concerns. Struna's Checker cab, #3F89, a 1981 model, was retired under similar circumstances on December 15, 1998.

At the height of the vehicle's popularity in the roaring 20's, there were as many as 8,000 Checker cabs plying the roads of New York City. The Checker cab virtually ruled the roads from 1921 to the late 1970s, outlasting many other popular taxi types that included cabs made by DeSoto, Packard, Plymouth and earlier taxi models manufactured by Ford (the Galaxy) and Chevrolet (the Bel Air and Caprice).

In 1982, the Checker Motors company of Kalamazoo ceased production of the Checker cab, signaling the beginning of the end for the vehicle made world famous in many New York City-set movies, such as *Breakfast at Tiffany's* and *Sleepless in Seattle*. The Checker was the cab of choice for the popular TV show "Taxi," as well as for "Friends" character Phoebe, who drove an inherited hack part-time.

"There's no doubt in my mind that the Checker is one of the most recognizable symbols of New York City," said Commissioner McKechnie, "and that it will be sorely missed. It's important that we have an opportunity to say a proper goodbye to it. But New Yorkers are a practical people, and today stands also as an opportunity to say hello to a new generation of taxicabs, one of which we have on display here today." Commissioner McKechnie was alluding to the Chevrolet Venture minivan taxicab parked nearby the two departing Checkers, which is one of 14 of the new vehicles being tested in an experimental pilot program. This model joins the approximately 600 minivan taxicabs already on the streets of New York City.

There are exactly 12,187 taxicabs in the City of New York, with the vast majority currently made up of Ford Crown Victorias, and the remainder made up of those Chevrolet Caprice models remaining after Chevrolet's discontinuation of its manufacture, almost 600 Honda Odyssey and Isuzu Oasis taxicabs, two Lincoln Town Cars, two Mercedes Benz taxicabs, and a number of Ford Explorer taxicabs.

The TLC wishes to thank everyone whose invaluable assistance made this event possible, including Brendan Sexton, president of the Times Square Business Improvement District (BID), Bob Esposito of the Times Square BID, and Alan and Kevin Rosen of the world-famous Junior's Restaurant.

The event will be shown in its entirety on City Hall Today, a production of the Crosswalks Television Network, and will air on channel 74.