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DEATH BY PARKING THE PHANTOM

CHAPTER 9

I Was Just Being A Good Guy ...

By JVH



Hey, I thought I was just being a good father and trying to interest my son in the family business. How the hell did I get eyeball to eyeball with guys whose names ended in vowels and whose mothers cooked pasta in Sicily? I thought this was a fantasy from an overactive teenage imagination. Ghosts in parking garages, strange lights and sounds? It was absurd. But, here I am, looking over my shoulder, my wife and son barricaded in our office. It made no sense. I'm Paul Manning, Private Investigator. I work out of a nice building on LA's Sunset Boulevard. My 16-year-old son, Paul Jr., or Paulo as I call him, woke me early one morning with an incredible tale of ghosts in a parking garage near his school. I felt it would be a good learning experience for him, so we staked out the garage. Sure enough, there they were, apparitions that seemed to be Igor on the parapet. Plus, the lights were flickering on and off. They disappeared before we had a chance to investigate further, so we decided to talk it over with the garage's owner. After he stopped laughing, he told us that the garage was being tested for problems with the concrete. The engineers were working at night when the place was empty and dragging chains across the floor so they could hear where the rebar was rusting and potentially causing problems.

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was about to punch him out for laughing at my son, when we got word that a body had been found at the garage. We were hired on the spot to represent the owner and find out what had happened.

My best friend, LAPD Capt. Bill Vose, was running the investigation. Paulo and I were about to leave when a panel truck rolled into our car. A second body was in the driver's seat. The truck had been rented by the consulting firm that was doing the testing in the garage. Both dead men were employees of that firm.

We decided it might be a good idea to interview the man who originally owned and built the garage. He got a bit huffy when we asked about the garage construction. A bit later, his wife told us that something was "in" the garage, put there when the concrete was wet, that might "change what we believed about what happened in July 1964." And, no, it had nothing to do with the death of Marilyn Monroe.

Curioser and curioser. We did some basic detective research and found that the garage was built on land owned

Continued on Page 70

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Death by Parking – The Phantom

from Page 69

by the Mob. It was time to talk again with Capt. Vose. Our discussion was short. An FBI agent was present and basically told me that if I didn't drop the case, my family and I were at risk.

I knew I could take care of myself, but I was concerned about Paulo and his mother, Shirley, who in her non-mothering moments, ran our office. We agreed

that they should work out of the office, with two operatives close by, while I did the field work.

The next stop was the consulting firm that was quickly losing its employees. Martina Smithson, the person in charge of the office now that her boss had been killed, didn't take too much convincing to tell me that they were really there

not to test the garage (it was obviously in good shape), but to find a box that had been put in the wet concrete 30 years ago.

Her boss had found the box but tried to hold up their employers, and his lifeless body was the result. He had hidden the box, and now the Mob was looking for it.

I was thinking out loud – "I wonder where it could be?" – when Smithson said, "Oh, I know where it is."

I gave her a look that translated into "well ..."

"Before he was killed, Frank told me that if anything happened to him, there was a key in his desk on the ring with all the office keys. It was obviously different, he told me, and that I should give it to the police. With all that's happened, I haven't looked for it."

I gave her another "well ..." look.

Smithson opened the drawer to the desk, and there was the key ring. Sure enough, on the ring was a key that looked suspiciously like one a person might find in a locker at the bus station. She took the key off the ring and handed it to me. "You will know what to do with this," she said.

As I left the building, I started to dial Vose's number. Then I hung up. Curiosity was getting the best of me. I decided that it couldn't hurt to take a peek at the box before I turned it over to the police. After all, it technically was the property of my current employer. Well, it was a close call, but I wasn't going to call a lawyer to get a reading on this one.

The Greyhound bus station was in Skid Row in Downtown Los Angeles. Visualize the seediest, smelliest, most run-down bus terminal and you would not even be on the same page. This place was bad, really bad.

I stepped over a sleeping bum and walked toward the lockers. As I took out the key, two of the biggest gunsels I had ever seen appeared out of nowhere and stepped in front of me.

"We'll take dat key."

Fight or flight – I really didn't have time to think. I placed my heel as hard as I could on Mr. Big's instep and felt the satisfying feel of bones breaking. As he dropped to the floor, I kicked Mr. Little as hard as I could between the legs. Now was not a time for Marquis of Queensberry rules.

As they lay writhing on the floor, I opened the locker, took out a small metal container about the size of a cigar box, strolled to the door and out to my car.

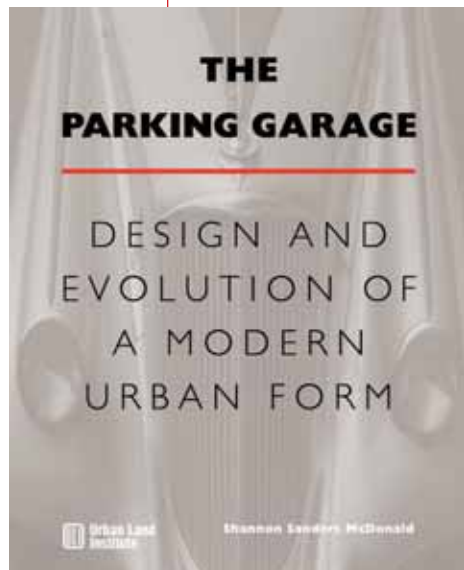
I owed it to Paulo not to open the

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metal box until I got back to the office. After all, it was his idea about something being buried in the garage and his research that led us to the facts that the garage didn't need testing and the real employers of the engineering firm were a company owned by a New Jersey corporation, Palermo Ltd. – the same company that owned the land on which the garage was built.

On the way to the office, I called Bill Vose at the LAPD and brought him up to speed. He said he would meet me on Sunset Boulevard. I then called the office and told Shirley to bring in a couple more operatives because things were probably going to get hot pretty fast. I was sure those two gunsels at the bus station were not going to be happy when they got out of the emergency room.

When I arrived at the office, it looked like a crime scene. And from the look on Bill's face, maybe it was. In addition to one fuming police captain, there were his assistant, some uniforms, a full forensic team and, yes, the FBI. When I rolled up, the forensics, gloves and all, walked to

my car, opened the passenger door, and took out the box.

We all then proceeded into my office, where Paulo and Shirley, along with my chief operative, Jim Walsh, and the others waited.

They put the box on the table and looked at Bill. He nodded his head.

The box was dirty and covered with bits of concrete. The experts used what looked like dental picks to scrape away the dirt and pry open the box. It was obvious it had been opened since it came out

of the garage floor, but they weren't taking any chances.

We all leaned in for a better look.

As the box lid was opened, it creaked like a door to a dungeon – well, a small dungeon. Most appropriate, considering our history with this project.

The forensic techs stepped back so we could get a better look. It was pretty obvious someone had been lying. The box was empty.

To be continued ...

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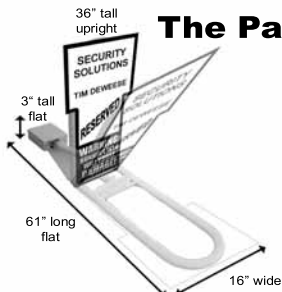


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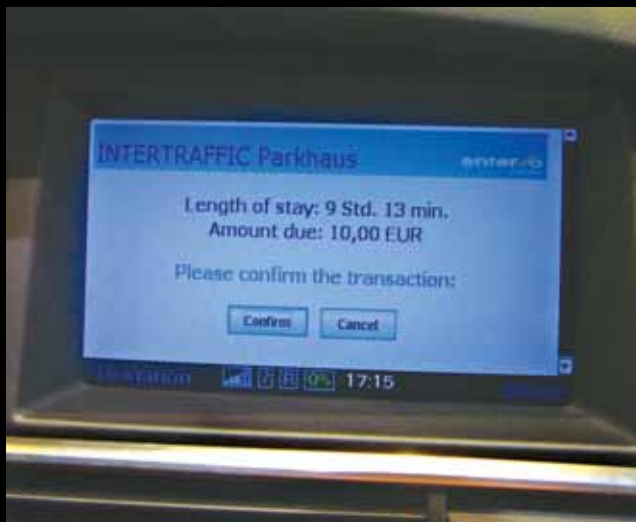
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Innovations a

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Skidata US Sales Manager Keith Lynch demonstrated its new graphic "wheel" based human/machine interface. Using technology similar to Apple's iPhone, the system allows customers to purchase all types of products (tickets, make reservations, etc.), as well as pay-and-reserve parking.



Onboard vehicle display combines a car's internal vehicle identification system with Scheidt & Bachmann's revenue control systems. Payment is done automatically from the car's onboard computer.

Continued on Page 74

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Innovations at Intertraffic!!!

from Page 73



Parkeon Chairman and CEO Yves Chambeau and a cutting-edge pay-and-display unit. This prototype is both solar- and wind-powered.



Schweers CEO Peter Cabral displays the company's newest trim-line handheld ticketing system.

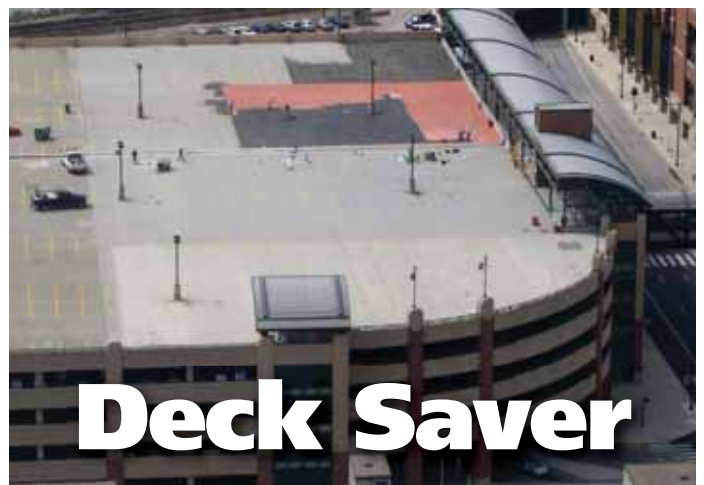
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Ali Khaksar, Manager of Tagmaster North America, next to the company's new antenna. The system, designed for large vehicles fleet work, can read a tag up to 80 feet away.



Zeag USA President Mark Reed next to his company's redesigned revenue control equipment. It will be on display at the IPI show in Dallas.

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JVH comments on Parking News every day at PT Blog – log on at www.parkingtoday.com. Each month, there are at least 40 other comments like these, posted daily.

Shopping and Free Parking

OK, I went shopping at the Grove, a local high-end center in central Los Angeles. It has a great parking facility, with counters telling you which floor has available space and everything. They spent over a million bucks on their valet lobby, but I digress.

I did my shopping and then asked for a validation (I had left my ticket in my car). I was told by the store that since I didn't have my ticket, I should go to the concierge desk and they would give me an exit pass (I had spent enough to have a full day of free parking).

he concierge told me that I couldn't get the pass unless I signed up for their "bonus club" program – a deal that meant filling out endless forms and prob-

ably exposing my e-mail account to even more spam. So I simply asked again for the exit pass. I was again told, more firmly, that I would have to sign up.

Disgusted, I grumbled off, forming the letter I was going to write developer Rick Caruso, telling him how his extremely high-class and actually super shopping experience had been ruined by rules that couldn't be broken by line personnel. (I felt that when I waved my four-figure receipt, the answer should have been, "Yes, sir, here's your exit pass, and thank you for visiting the Grove," and not some bureaucratic doubletalk.

I got to my car, letter firmly in my brain, drove to the exit and put in my ticket, ready to pay, under protest, with my credit card. The gate opened. I had come and gone within the "free" time period. (I think it's half an hour.)

My anger evaporated, the letter was forgotten. However, in the end, that's not the point.

The point is that line personnel need to be able to make on-the-spot decisions

that cost the company little or nothing, but create fantastic PR. One of Caruso's tenants, Nordstrom, has built its reputation on just such decision making. There is an urban legend that someone showed up at a Nordstrom's asking to return some faulty tires. The clerk accepted the tires; Nordstrom's doesn't sell tires.

It may have cost the store a few hundred bucks, but in the end, the publicity it got from that one incident has been worth millions.

A Solution to a Complex Problem

Municipalities find themselves in a bind. According to a friend in the Northeast, his city's enforcement and collections are a hodgepodge of pay-and-display, meters, handhelds, and two or three different back-office software packages. He now wants to add pay-by-cellphone to the mix. He says the cellphone companies are working with software and hardware vendors but "aren't there" yet.

Fair enough. But what does one do in



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the meantime, and who wants to be the “alpha site”?

Chicago took an interesting approach, but for a different reason. Suffice to say, they didn’t want to change their enforcement procedures at all. So they didn’t. They added a pay-by-cellphone operation that works off an “in-car meter.”

This way, you – the city – do nothing. You continue as you have been. It’s a “bridge” technology. You use it until something better comes along, or until it proves to be the way to go.

Is this perfect? Of course not. Nothing is. But it can get past some of the problems and expense of having to re-invent your back office or replace tons of on-street equipment.

OK, you cellphone guys, let me have it ...

Pregnancy and Parking

I have been trying to write about this for a couple of days, but I’m not sure which side of the issue I can stake out. It has to do with parking and pregnancy.

The state of California is discussing allowing third-trimester women to get “handicapped” tags letting them park in handicapped spaces. Naturally, all hell has broken loose because women don’t want pregnancy to be considered a “handicap.” However, it is true, at least in my circle, that very pregnant women do have a bit of a problem getting around.

Some of those discussing the issue said that pregnant women should park farther away since they need the exercise. Boy, I bet they slept on the couch after that little tidbit.

I think, after careful consideration, that this should be a decision left up to each individual store, merchant and parking facility owner. If they want, they can put up a couple of “pregnant only” parking signs (you know, nice little pink-and-blue ones with storks and babies on them). I have seen them in front of some Kmart and Wal-Mart. I dare someone who isn’t pregnant to park in the space when a full-term mom shows up with her 2-year-old. This will be self-policing.

And it’s good merchandising. Everyone will get a nice smile at the

signs, and “almost a moms” will get a little relief.

They tried to do this four years ago in California, and the brouhaha was so great that the legislation died a quiet death. I’ll bet that happens again.

Yeah, the signs are the best approach; keep the government out of it.

(Note: As projected, the bill died in

committee.)

For a reaction to this by someone who knows the problem first hand, see “The Amateur Parker” in this month’s PT.

How Smart Are Smart Cars?

Smart cars are really smart, and easy to park. But, be careful. If you buy

Continued on Page 78



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from Page 77

one of the new Mercedes-built tiny vehicles, be sure you park it the same way you currently do with your 20-foot-long super tanker. Yep, even though the smart car will fit nose to curb and still not protrude any further into the street than if you parked in a normal manner, the law says you must have your right tires within 18 inches of the curb. I'm told that in San Francisco – where else? – that if you and your buddy park your smart cars in one parking space, that's legal, as long as someone pays the meter. If the time runs out, both cars are ticketed.

Of course, my belief is that both should pay for parking, but if you like, charge them less since they are using less curb space. Now that makes sense, just as a stretch Escalade should pay more than my Escort. Pay for what you use.

These smart cars are going to mean some changes in the laws – not a bad idea.

Oh, my sister-in-law in Calgary has one of these things. We were talking with her boyfriend one day about noise and being able to hear each other in the car. He says it's no problem. You are only inches apart.

Go, Charlie, Go ...

My buddy Charlie Munn stepped in and gave me a hand with a couple of articles when I was out last fall having a bit of cow installed ... or maybe it was bull. Anyway, thanks to Charlie.

However, his work as a parking writer seems to have blossomed.

For some unknown reason, I received my copies of the March issues of Parking and The Parking Professional on the same day and dutifully sat down to read every bon mot the NPA and IPI had to say.

Suddenly I was confused. I thought I had finished one magazine and had started the next, but found articles that weren't on the same topic but were written with the same wit and turn of phrase. I looked at the author (I rarely do that) and lo and behold, it was Charlie and Charlie and Charlie and Charlie. He had penned four articles (two each) for the two magazines in the same month.

Then I went back and looked at The Parking Professional in February, January and December, and found old Charlie boy had five bylined articles between the three issues. Wow, this guy is hot!!

I look forward to more and more of Charlie's holding forth on the parking industry over the next few issues of both magazines.

BART Beleaguered

Read the following at your own risk – the headline is great compared with the rest.

The Bay Area Rapid Transit District is getting flak from its board members due to complaints from riders that the technology used in the parking areas is too complicated for the average driver in "Baghdad by the Bay." If one tries to reach the Bar-

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bary Coast from Oakland or San Leandro, he has to drive to the station, park, pay for parking at a pay-by-space machine, then press on to his train and a transfer to a little cable car...

The problem, it seems, is that folks can't remember their space numbers or they make an error punching in the three or four digits. That being the case, an alert enforcement officer nails them, a citation is written, and thus begins a conflict that probably ends at the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, which most likely will say the charge for parking was unconstitutional, only to be overturned on a 9-zip decision by the Supreme Court.

According to my buddy Kevin Hagerty of BART, parking is becoming a major issue, as ridership increases and more and more folks are cheating on the lots. BART issues parking permits, and often the reserved spaces are taken by non-permit holders and the problem is made even worse.

This is a classic example where a "bridge" technology has been installed, only to be, extremely quickly, overtaken by another, potentially longer-lasting technology.

Most of the wags in the industry, looking at the macro of on-street parking, have posited that pay-and-display and pay-on-foot are technologies bridging between the parking meter and something out there – in San Francisco's case, halfway to the stars.

The problem is that folks are rushing to the train, don't want to take the time to deal with a meter, and haven't planned ahead enough to buy a permit (which, by the way, are sold in limited

numbers). Naturally, they will make mistakes at the P-by-S machine, or if they came from Berkeley and are heading for the Haight, might transpose a number or two.

The solution: pay-by-cellphone.

I have noted that Chicago and innumerable other cities use this technology. It doesn't replace pay-by-space or pay-and-display, but it enables those who wish to pay their parking fees on the run, so to speak. You park your car. Hit a preset on your phone, enter your space number, and that's it. No messing with money, cards, or waiting in line for the machine. This is the perfect application, since most of the people in the lots use them every day.

Of course, this doesn't solve the problems with the folks from the smoke-filled rooms in Berkeley because you still have to press the right button on the cellphone and enter the space number. But you can't have everything.

The neat thing about pay-by-cellphone is that you can add it to your system with very little capital outlay, it solves the problem, and you can still keep your existing system for folks who prefer to use it.

Some of these blog entries were in March. You could have read them then, and commented if you liked, by logging on to www.parkingtoday.com and clicking on "blog." JVH updates the blog almost every day.

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ACS, Inc.	51	Kimley-Horn	66	TransCore, Inc.	25
AIMS(EDC)	21	L&R Group of Companies	44	Transquip Pro	53
Alliant Insurance Services, Inc.	76	L&R Group of Companies	45	Trans-Tech	24
Alpha Technologies, LTD	79	Lighthouse Signs	40	Universal Boot	75
Altus Group	29	Login Parking LLC	54	Urban Land Institute	70
Boomerang Systems	33	MacKay Meters, Inc.	56	Videx	68
Cambridge Architects	13	MacKay Meters, Inc.	57	Volatile Free, Inc.	74
Carl Walker, Inc.	50	Magnetic Automation	59	W.S. Tyler U.S.A.	73
Carl Walker, Inc.	82	Metric Parking	46	Walker Parking Consultants	63
CashCode Company Inc.	34	MGR Industries	40	Weldon, Williams & Lick, Inc.	71
Casio	65	Modern Access	58	Zeag USA	87
Code Blue	11	Nagels North America	10	Zendex Tool	35
Consulting Engineers Group, Inc.	82	Next Parking, LLC	67		
Cooper Lighting	38	O'Neil Printer Supplies	78	FOCUS ADS	
Daktronics, Inc.	73	PARC Distributor Group	67	APARC	60
Desman Associates	83	Parcxmart	41	Carl Walker, Inc.	60
Desman Associates - Transportation	74	Parkeon	15	DoorKing, Inc.	60
Digital Payment Technologies	65	Parking Sentry & Security Bollard Co.	72	Integra Park	60
Digital Printing Systems	72	Reno A&E	36	Intelenergy	60
DoorKing, Inc.	43	Scheidt & Bachmann USA Inc.	31	MacKay Meters, Inc.	60
Duncan Solutions, Inc.	47	Sentry Protection Products	66	MacKay Meters, Inc.	61
Eastern Waterproofing & Restoration	73	Sign Factory	69	Metric Parking	61
Enovar Solutions	71	SKIDATA, INC.	5	Modern Access	62
Federal APD	2	Southland Printing Co.	3	Nagels North America	61
Genetec	12	Southland Printing Co.	80	O'Neil Printer Supplies	61
Guardian Traffic Systems	52	Street Smart Technologies	19	Par-Kut International	61
Hamilton Mfg. Corp.	64	T2 Systems, Inc.	37	PayLock, Inc.	61
Haskell	77	T2 Systems, Inc.	39	POM Incorporated	62
Hayes Software Systems	23	Talk-A-Phone	8	Reno A&E	62
IntegraPark	7	Tannery Creek Systems, Inc.	81	Ring Communications	62
Integrated Parking Solutions	55	TCS International	69	Talk-A-Phone	62
International Downtown Assoc.	49	The Parking Network	83	Toledo Ticket Co.	62
IPS Group, Inc.	9	Toledo Ticket Co.	88	Zeag	62

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Cars are protected by fabric at the St. Thomas Marriott. At this year's IPI, Vehicle Protection Structures is providing a presentation devoted to showing current uses for covered parking to future trends and materials. Attendees will learn of the latest in design, materials and cost involved and components and hardware for covered parking. The benefits to those who attend will be in the form of increased awareness and knowledge of the potential of these structures to a particular parking type or future need. Samuel Armijos, AIA, Vice president of USA Shade and Fabric Structures is leading the presentation.

Upcoming Events

2008

June 1 - 4, 2008

IPI Annual Conference & Expo

Location: Dallas TX - Dallas Convention Center
Contact: Lauri Chudoba
540-371-7535
Email: chudoba@parking.org

June 17 - 19, 2008

AIMS 2008 User Conference

Location: Syracuse, NY
Contact: Ellen Genung
800-886-6316
Email: sales@edc-aim.com

September 9 - 11, 2008

TranspoQuip Latin America 2008

Location: Sao Paulo, Brazil
Contact: Sebas van den Ende
+ 55 21 3717 4719
Email: info@transpoquip.com

September 15 - 18, 2008

**National Parking Association
57th Annual Convention**

Location: Caesar's Palace,
Las Vegas, NV
Contact: Pat Langfeld
800 647 PARK
Email: plangfeld@npapark.org

September 23 - 26, 2008

**Southwest Parking Association 7th Annual
Conference and Trade Show**

Location: Arizona Golf Resort - Mesa AZ
Contact: Theresa Fletcher 480-965-6688
Email: Theresa.fletcher@gmail.com

October 1 - 3, 2008

**Michigan Parking Association
Fall Conference 2008**

Location: Traverse City, Michigan
Contact: Mark Erby 734.941-8930
Email: mark.erby@wcaa.us

October 4 - 8, 2008

**Canadian Parking Association Annual
Conference and Trade Show**

Location: Victoria BC
Contact: Mathieu Blake
613-727-0700
Email: mathieu@canadianparking.ca

October 12 - 14, 2008

**Australian Parking Convention
& Trade Exhibition**

Location: Sebel Citigate Albert Park -
Melbourne
Contact: Helane Doyle +613-9682-0500
Email: helaned@icmsaust.com

October 15 - 17, 2008

Interparking Shanghai 2008

Location: Shanghai China
Contact: Richard Chen
+86 (0)21 62472343
Email: cxp@siec-ccpit.com

October 29 - 31, 2008

**New York State Parking Association 16th
Annual Conference**

Location: Villa Roma Resort Callicoon, NY
Contact: Johnna M. Frosini
585 395-2564
Email: jfrosini@brockport.edu

November 5 - 7, 2008

T2 PowerHouse User Group Conference

Location: Downtown Marriott Hotel,
Indianapolis, IN
Contact: Tracy Maymon
317-524-7453
Email: tmaymon@t2systems.com

2009

April 21 - 23, 2009

Traffex 2009

Location: NEC Birmingham, England
Contact: Hemming Group Ltd
+44020 7973 6401

May 17 - 20, 2009

**International Parking Conference
and Exposition**

Location: Denver Convention Center,
Denver, Colorado
Contact: Lauri Chudoba
540-371-7535
Email: ipi@parking.org

June 28 - July 1, 2009

World Parking Symposium VII

Location: Breda, The Netherlands
Contact: Doreen Ostrowski
Email: doreen.canacn@sympatico.cag

September 23 - 25, 2009

14th European Parking Association Congress

Location: Vienna Austria
Contact: Gerhard Trost-Heutmekers
+49 (0)221 257 10 1
Email: epa@europeanparking.eu

September 26 - 30 2009

**Canadian Parking Association Annual
Conference and Trade Show**

Location: Quebec, QC
Contact: Mathieu Blake
613-727-0700
Email: mathieu@canadianparking.ca

2010

October 2 - 6, 2010

**Canadian Parking Association Annual
Conference and Trade Show**

Location: Whistler, BC
Contact: Mathieu Blake
613-727-0700
Email: mathieu@canadianparking.ca



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