



The Wheels On The Bus Go Round and Round

by JD Hardin

Oh, the wheels on the buses in Henry County Schools go round and round every morning and every afternoon as the buses crisscross the expansive district. Henry County Schools exploded from just a few schools to 50 schools. Approximately 310 bus drivers safely deliver their extended family members each year. These new family members are student riders, of course. For eight matriarchs of the student transportation realm, the past 30 plus years have introduced them to generations of families and extended their own by several thousand members.

Elaine Battle, Darlene Campbell, Charlotte Elston, Pam Evans, Pat Johnston, Ann Moyers, Patsy Newell, and Laraine Tinsley each deserve a gold medal to wear while driving their golden yellow buses. Each has seen her fair share of students over the years, and they all have enough stories to fill four or five issues of this magazine.

In a recent meeting with the drivers it was easy to see the passion for their craft in the words used to recall the highs and lows of their days ensuring students arrive at school safe and sound. However, craft seems to fall short of qualifying what years of doing what you love can evolve into. While there were lows each driver could remember, the number of highs dwarfs the rough spots and keeps them going in a profession that does not receive much fanfare. Hopefully the lack of notoriety will be reversed, because these skilled professionals are the starting point for many students and their education and ultimately the future of our country.

A Georgian by the name of Jimmy Carter was in the White House when the most tenured of the eight drivers opened her first bus door to students eagerly awaiting a ride on the first day of school. Since a few of these ladies started driving a bus in the late 70's, Henry County Schools have gone from around a dozen schools and approximately 6,100 students, to 50 schools and 40,000 students. Of those 40,000 students -- 24,000 students utilize one of the safest modes of transportation around.

If you count the number of people sitting on their buses, regardless of if the passenger rode twice in one day or if they ride every day of the week, each lady has probably transported a half of a million riders during their career. Let that sink in for a moment. Combined, the ladies have over 260 years

of experience behind the wheel! And let's not forget that drivers, especially those featured here, are much more than bus drivers. When they are on the bus -- they are parents, psychologists, nurses, counselors, investigators, mediators, and guardians. They may not hold degrees for these other professions, but their riders respect them enough to engage them in these roles. The bond between students and school bus drivers is one that lasts a lifetime for a great number of those rolling through communities on the oh so recognizable yellow buses.

From a stick-shift manual bus with no air and minimal safety regulations...to now having some of the common features you would find in a car, there have been many transformations in the school bus industry. These ladies have experienced it all as they conscientiously delivered their precious cargo that would become doctors, lawyers, politicians, small business owners, professional athletes, police and firemen, clergy, scientists, engineers, welders, teachers, artists, chefs, mechanics, and many other occupations. Without these dedicated ladies and their love for their profession, the student riders would not have made it to the schools that started them toward their current careers. And by looking at their smiles and hearing them talk, you know each one of these ladies takes pride in their job and enjoys being a part of it all.