

Big wheels: Allen school bus drivers pursue new routes in off time

by Jared Johnson

Allen bus drivers are big wheels in the eyes of children. They are the first people students meet each morning and the last smiling face they see before returning home.

What kids may not realize is that many of their drivers spend the remainder of their part-time schedules enjoying other pursuits. Indeed, who knows what kind of celebrity may be behind the wheel



Victoria Tierney.

next time the bus rolls up to your intersection? They may be a military veteran, a carpenter, a community volunteer or a world-class painter.

Every driver's life tells a story. And although there is hardly enough room to share them all, we've spotlighted five who never seem to hit the brakes.

Victoria Tierney

After dropping off her passengers at school, Victoria Tierney picks up a

paintbrush and power saw. She spends several days a week remodeling homes in the Allen area from floor to ceiling. For the past three years, Tierney has teamed with friend Lisa McMullan to remodel tiles, carpets, walls, stairs and just about anything else that their customers request. The duo initially completed simple repairs for neighbors and friends, and they soon became an official partnership due to high demand.

Tierney, a native of Toronto, Canada, moved to Allen seven years ago and has driven buses for five years. This year she also made room in her schedule to attend classes at Collin County Community College, where she hopes to earn a degree in medical technology or nursing. For now, though, remodeling remains a relaxing escape where her true colors can shine through.

"It's real rewarding when you stand back and look at what you've done," she said.

James Jackson

A reward of bus driving for James Jackson is how perfectly it fits into his schedule. The retired Army veteran of 22 years knew it was time to steer his life in a new direction a year and a half ago, but he didn't realize it would guide him to such a fulfilling position.

Jackson's road in life included an

unforeseen turn when he was laid off in March 2002. He decided to return to school and enrolled full-time at the University of Texas-Dallas. That summer, he went to lunch with a former co-worker who now drives a school bus in Frisco. Their conversation convinced him to apply for a driving job with Allen ISD while finishing his degree in business management.

"At the time, [driving a bus] was the furthest thing from my mind," Jackson said. "But I realized it was the perfect part-time job when going to school. You drive in the morning, you don't have to be back until 2:30 in the afternoon, and you're done for the day by 4:30."

With school and a new career path, Jackson is eager for the future, but enjoys each day he drives the school bus. As for the future, he hopes to earn his degree in fall 2004 and work for the government.

Mac McGinnis

Jackson could probably compare notes with Mac McGinnis. Mac also spends a lot of time in college classrooms, but on the other side of the desk. McGinnis teaches fundamental computer courses at Collin County Community College and Richland College in between bus routes at Boyd Elementary and Ford Middle School. The combination has given him the flexible, low-stress career balance he sought for years. He also has a lot of fun.

"I used to work in a pressured environment," McGinnis said. "It was a suit-and-tie, high-pressure job. But one day I stepped back and said I wanted something different."

Teaching at local colleges offered a way to utilize his electronics background without a stressful workplace. He spent ten years in the Navy as an electronics warfare specialist, earning a master's degree in computer science. Being an adjunct faculty member requires between 30 and 40 hours a week, allowing time for fun-filled field trips with the Allen High School football team

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and other school groups. He particularly enjoyed driving the Eagles to their playoff games. The pressure this postseason was on quarterback Greg Richardson, not the bus drivers. And that's just fine with McGinnis, who hopes to continue driving and teaching for many years.

Clinton Webb

The greatest escape for Clinton Webb comes in a Hudson: a '53 Hornet with a Twin-H Power dual carburetor and V-6 flathead engine, to be exact. Of course, it's not necessary to understand the lingo to appreciate the excitement of restoring antique cars. Since retiring from working at an oil company, the school bus driver has more time to devote to the three antiques in his garage.

"When I was a kid, things were simpler," said Webb. "You would get into a car, and you could go for a ride to get away from it all."

"Money was tight while growing up in Beaumont", said Webb. "You had to work for everything you had." Webb's schooling included half days pumping gas at a service station. At 15, he bought a 1950 Hudson Super Six for \$70. His buddies helped find parts to get it running.



Clinton Webb and Hudson Hornet.

It was the start of a lifelong appreciation for antique cars, particularly Hudsons. Clinton is now president of the national Hudson owners' club. Gatherings take him across the country, from Utah to the Midwest and nearly everywhere in between. And they don't fly, they drive.

"It's an escape from everything. That's the greatest pleasure I get out of it," said Webb.

It's hard to argue when you feel that 300-cubic-inch engine kick into overdrive on the freeway.

Pat Kenwell

Pat Kenwell has been behind the bus wheel almost as long as she has backed her championship show dogs. When Pat moved to Texas in 1976, she began spending her available time training and showing dogs at competitions. To be named a champion, a dog must accumulate points at contests. Joshua, an Irish setter, was Pat's first champion, becoming one of the first of his breed to receive a number of awards including his versatility certification. "After that, I was hooked. I thought, 'Gosh! This is so much fun!'" Kenwell said.

Raising a champion takes months of preparation. Kenwell must follow regimented guidelines with her dogs: feed them the right food, maintain the right weight and muscle tone, brush them daily, bathe and condition them weekly, and foster a champion's attitude.

"They have to have that 'show attitude,' where they say, 'Hey! Look at me! I'm the best!'" she said.

Pat is driven by a sense of accomplishment. She said showing dogs isn't a moneymaking hobby because of



Pat Kenwell and Mackenzie.

the related expenses: entry fees, veterinary visits, food, grooming supplies and travel expenses, among others. Rather, it's a time for her to get together with friends and see the country. Of course, having a few national champions in the house doesn't hurt either. This is Pat's twentieth year as a bus driver. ❖

Jared Johnson is the Public Information Specialist for Allen Independent School District.



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