

Driver

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medical assistant and X-ray technician.

Her husband Robert worked nights, and the two shared child-care duties when sons, Robert, 19, and Daniel, 15, were small. That allowed her to handle the early morning hours.

She was a bus aide two years, then a substitute bus driver one year and a regular driver for eight years.

She's in the bus garage at 6:15 a.m.

"I love the flexibility driving a bus gives me," Carver says. "I have the time in between to run errands and take care of dental appointments."

Carver drives five hours and 35 minutes a day. She makes \$14.27 an hour.

It's a woman's world these days at the bus garage. Just three men — two sub drivers and one regular — are employed, Carver said.

"Bus yard supervisor Malen Terry, who died two years ago, thought women made better bus drivers than men because they are more patient with children and road conditions," Carver said.

Driver shortage

When the district became short of drivers several years ago, bus aides were encouraged to become bus drivers so that they could be used as needed, Carver said.

Carver holds a chauffeur's and a commercial truck driver's license (CDL). She took four weeks of intensive training to become a driver. She also had to pass a test on air brakes.

Carver can never use bad, winter weather as a reason to stay cozy in bed and not make it into work, either. She lives close to work and tries to walk five miles a day.

"All my neighbors are bus drivers," Carver said.

Carver is part of the Farmington Transportation Association, which has been working without a contract since July.

"We've talked to other transportation units (in other districts), and they don't do what we do. We're very close. We bowl together, took a canoe trip together (22 people) play softball and volleyball."

On Saturday, Oct. 16, the transportation association will hold a craft sale at East Middle School from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. All proceeds go to Farmington youth. The group also holds a raffle in November to assist senior citizens with Christmas baskets.

Trying days

With the district's permission, a school bus, complete with a "Mr. and Mrs. Claus," she said. Like any occupation, school bus drivers have their trying days.

"You never tell them (students) you are a new driver," Carver said. "You can never tell somebody to just get off the bus, touch a child or swear."

Carver's mission is to get the kids home safely.

But, with kids, much to the driver's best efforts and dismay, have sometimes strikes and, in unusual circumstances, the driver must return to school.

Like the time when one middle school kid knocked another kid's teeth out and ended up breaking his own hand, Carver said.

As for discipline, "three write-ups and they are taken off the bus," Carver said.

There are routine rules for riding the bus, too. "You can't spit



STAFF PHOTOGRAPHY SHARON LEMLEY

Reflection detection: Farmington schools bus driver Debra Carver looks back in her mirror, letting the riders know which child is next by calling out a name.

on my floor," Carver said. "I hate that. And, they're not going to hang out the windows."

Carver is especially fond of special education kids.

Disciplinary problems come in the afternoon, she said. "In the morning, kids sleep on the way to school."

In the afternoon, Carver delivers each of 23 kindergartners to his or her home. It's a long ride for some, especially Colleen Leikert, who lives on 12 Mile near Middlebelt. As the last child dropped off, she rides the bus for almost an hour, as Carver follows the dictated bus route.

Bus routes are picked by seniority. "You pick by the lead school and whatever's with the package."

"I love the kids," Carver said.



Bus banter: Freshman Dawn Sevy looks over at fellow students from North Farmington High School. The boys Erik Heffernan (left), Ivo Gasparotto, and Cortney Robinson look at a magazine.

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