

Mom leads district charge to 'buckle up' WL school buses

by TIM SHUTE
STAFF WRITER

Kidnapping? Spencer Hartley went flying when the Wall Lake school bus he was riding one recent afternoon hit a patch of ice. The 6-year-old struck his head against the metal emergency door handle, and sustained serious enough facial abrasions to be rushed to Huron Valley Hospital.

Spencer, who is a student at Pleasant Lake Elementary School, is OK. He did not require stitches from his injury.

"There was a lot of bleeding," said Spencer's mom, Susan Hartley. "But we really lucked out."

Still, Hartley wants to make sure that such luck doesn't run out the next time a school bus mishap occurs. She is leading a campaign — including contacting state representatives — to improve bus safety via the installation of seat belts or other measures.

"After this happened, I must have received 20 phone calls from parents and neighbors," Hartley said. "They are all thinking the same thing. 'Why aren't there seat belts on school buses?'"

It's a state law that, through age 16, (children) are to be in seat belts or safety restraints. Since it's the business of schools to transport children ages 6 to 16, why aren't they in buses?

Concurring was parent Karen Lowy, whose 6-year-old son Steven also attends Pleasant

Lake.

"I kind of want to find out the answer myself," Lowy said. "My older daughter (Rachel, 10) fell out of the seat once. I guess evacuation is one side of the equation."

Hartley last week sent letters to state Rep. Barbara Dobb and state Sen. Willis Bullard, asking them to "consider legislation to require safety restraints in school buses."

She also wants to discuss the issue at a future school board meeting. The next meeting is set for 7:30 p.m. Thursday, March 6 at the Educational Services Center.

Before then, Hartley will meet with district transportation supervisor Linda Broderick to discuss the pros and cons of implementing such restraints.

"They (seat belts) are really not approved for us to use," said Broderick Thursday, adding that Wall Lake schools once tried a pilot seat belt program, before she joined the district four years ago. Special education students still do have safety restraints available for them to use.

But apparently there were more problems with them than without, such as youngsters having "big, heavy metal seat buckles to hit each other with. Another issue is emergency evacuation. Would 60-to-80 kids on a bus be able to undo their seat belts in an emergency?"

Enforcement is yet another potential headache, stressed Broderick. "Who makes sure

they're buckled in? And if someone's hurt, whose at fault?"

The veteran transportation official mentioned that padding emergency door handles could be one relatively inexpensive way to solve the problem.

"Or why not Velcro straps or arm rests to hold them in their seats?" asked Hartley.

Broderick expects to discuss potential solutions with an official from Hoekstra Truck, the district's local representative for bus manufacturer Thomas Buss.

Parent Karen Lowy also wants the transportation department to look at the Feb. 6 incident, which took place when the driver was making subdivision-to-subdivision rounds. The student was injured after the driver hit a patch of ice turning left from Oakley Park Road onto Rebecca Circle, Broderick said.

"Something serious could have happened," Lowy said. "This is a wake-up call that we should have restraints. At least for elementary school students."

According to Hartley, her campaign is not intended to slam the district for how it handles transportation, but to "bring about some awareness. It's a kind of scary putting your kid on a school bus, anyway."

And, following the injury to Spencer, Hartley worries about whether two younger sons (ages 4 and 2) will even want to ride a bus. "My 4-year-old is pretty traumatized about prospects of riding one."

OBITUARIES

WILLY ROBERT WINGBLAD

Willy Wingblad, 68, died Feb. 12, at Providence Hospital in Southfield.

A resident of Farmington Hills, Mr. Wingblad was toolmaker for the automotive industry and a veteran of the Korean War.

He is survived by wife, Florence; sons, Bar and Glen; daughters, Claudia Lynch and

Nancy Tituskin and eight grandchildren.

Funeral services were held on Feb. 15 at Heenev-Sunquist Funeral Home in Farmington Hills.

Officiating: Rev. Tom Slawinski.

Helen Dorothy Strenge

Helen Strenge, 85, died Feb. 12 at Botsford Continuing Health Care Center.

A resident of Farmington Hills, Mrs. Strenge was a homemaker, an avid tennis player and an artist.

She is survived by sons, William of Orchard Lake and Richard of Ashland, Ore.; daughter, Judy Brubaker of St. Simons Island, Ga.; two sisters; nine grandchildren and 13 great grandchildren.

The voice of public education

Urban School Success—We're All Responsible

Shirley McGinnis knew that Michigan Educational Assessment Program scores in Oak Park Public Schools were about as low as they could go five years ago. The once high performing Oakland County district was at the bottom of the state in some categories.

Morale in the district and the community also had bottomed out.

"All of us knew the district's image was hurting the kids," said Shirley, a special education and elementary science consultant.

So Shirley and other teachers, support staff, administrators, parents and the community resolved to reverse the downward spiral and rolled up their sleeves and got to work.

Teachers spent hundreds of extra hours learning new ways of teaching, reviewing and rewriting curricula and staffing a Saturday academy. Parents wrote a user-friendly handbook to explain district goals. Custodians and lunch room staff mentored students. Some principals even offered to do such outrageous things as shave their heads if students achieved higher scores. Gradually, MEAP scores—and more important—learning increased. This year, Oak Park Public Schools was the most improved district in the county and among the most improved in the state. Indeed, some of the district's scores, such as seventh grade math, now rank among the best in the state.

And yet, because of his lack of knowledge of what is occurring in our public schools, Gov. John Engler wrongly said in the media that Oak Park was among Michigan's "educationally bankrupt" school districts and targeted it for a state takeover. In his State of the State address last month, Engler proposed the "School District Accountability Act," which would allow the state to take over the administration of districts in which 80 percent of the students failed the High School Proficiency Test or where the dropout rate exceeded 25 percent. Oak Park officials say they don't fit in either category.

Many of the other so-called "educationally bankrupt" districts the governor cited have success stories similar to Oak Park's—whether they involve the entire district, one school, one classroom or even one student.

So instead of issuing threats based on inaccurate data and perceptions, the governor and other politicians should be showcasing—and building upon—public school successes.

That's not to say our urban districts are problem-free. They are not. But we need

to embrace strategies that we know will improve student achievement, such as parent involvement, high standards for teachers and students, professional development and smaller classes. State takeovers have not measurably improved student achievement in Newark, N.J., Cleveland, Ohio or most of the 20 or so other school districts nationally where this has been tried.

"There is no evidence that these takeovers have resulted in any gains in achievement and that's the bottom line," said Michael Casserly, executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools, a coalition of the nation's largest school districts. "Sometimes they result in cost savings, but that cost savings goes back to the state, not to the kids."

Our urban public school children deserve meaningful, lasting solutions. There are no shortcuts. We must involve local communities and build coalitions that are dedicated to improving living and learning conditions in our cities.

Building effective partnerships can be painstaking. That's why the Michigan Education Association started the Center for the Revitalization of Urban Education (CRUE). CRUE helps school districts form alliances with organizations and coalitions dedicated to improving urban education. CRUE has helped school districts in Wpsilanti, Flint, Saginaw and other cities focus on student achievement while also improving school safety, parent involvement and student nutrition, and increasing community and human service support.

We don't need a state takeover to rescue urban school districts. The keys to success already exist in most of our cities.

"We are not dealing with magic here," said Shirley McGinnis. "Everything that we are doing can be duplicated or modified because the keys to our success are our commitment and our cooperation with parents, businesses and the community in general."

Indeed, those are the keys that will open the doors of opportunity for not only our urban public school children, but for all of us.



Julius A. Maddox
MEA president

RECREATION NEWS

Each week the Recreation Division of the Farmington Hills Department of Special Services presents a synopsis of upcoming activities in this column. For further information regarding programs, contact the Recreation office at 473-9570. Pre-registration is required for most activities. For matters regarding Farmington Hills City Council agenda items, call the news line at 473-9532.

FRIDAY NIGHT MADNESS

Children ages 6-12 can enjoy swimming, a movie, gym activities and a snack from 7 to 11 p.m. Friday, Feb. 21, at the William Costick Activities Center. Participants should bring a bathing suit, towel and gym shoes. A \$10 per person pre-registration fee is required.

OPEN GYM

The William Costick Activities Center gym is open for basketball and volleyball open play as follows:

■Adult Basketball, 7-9 p.m. Thursday and 9-11 a.m. Sunday.
■Teen Basketball, 3-5 p.m. Saturday.

■Family Gym & Swim, 12:30-3 p.m. (swim 12:30-1:30 p.m.) Saturday.

■Adult Volleyball, 11 a.m.-1 p.m. Sunday.

The fee is \$2 for 17 and under, \$4 for non-residents, \$3 for adults and \$5 for non-residents.

COMET VIEW

Join Mike Best as he explains about comets and discusses the opportunity to view Comet Hale-Bopp. It will be the biggest comet of the year. The class will be held from 7-9 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 19, at the Heritage Park Visitor Center. A pre-registration fee of \$5 per person or \$15 per family is required.

HERITAGE PARK SHELTER RENTALS

Local residents are invited to visit the Department of Special Services office to reserve one of the three shelter locations within Heritage Park. Rental and deposit monies must be paid at the time of reservation. To obtain rental fees, location and size of shelter, please contact that office at 473-9570.

WINTER BREAK CAMP

Children ages 6-8 and 9-12 can

register for the Winter Break Camp that will be held 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., Feb. 17 through Feb. 21, at Heritage Park Day Camp Building. Children will enjoy activities of sledding, cross country skiing, as well as other activities. Pre-registration fee of \$75 per person is required. Maximum of 20 per camp.

ADULT SOFTBALL TEAM SIGNUP

Beginning on Feb. 18, new teams interested in playing in an adult softball league can register at the recreation office. Present league openings are for men's, women's and coed. Call 473-9570.

SWIM LESSONS

Starting the week of Feb. 22, there will be a five-session lesson program at the Costick Activities Center pool, 28600 11 Mile Road. Classes from pre-school beginners through youth advance at various times, Monday through Saturday. A pre-registration fee of \$25 is now being accepted at the recreation office. Private lessons are available by calling 478-1834.

Awards bring cable spotlight

Every time I have contact with Dean and Sue Cobb, TV-10 administrators for Farmington Public Schools, I wish I would have had the opportunity to learn in high school what they are teaching our children. Unfortunately, there wasn't cable then.

You see, when cable came into the area in 1989, the contract with the cities of Farmington, Novi and Farmington Hills, specified that TV production equipment be given to the schools so that TV production could be part of the curriculum.

It was really a great idea because producing quality video encourages brainstorming, organization, problem solving and team work. All these traits certainly come in handy later on in college and in the workplace — not to mention how much we use video in our daily lives.

Our schools are being nationally recognized for the fine work they do too. TV-10 for Farmington just won two awards in the Communicator Awards 1996 Television Commercials/Programs and Video/Films Competition.

The Communicator Awards is a national awards organization that recognizes work in the communications field. Entries are judged by a panel of professionals who look for companies, organizations and entities whose talent exceeds a high standard of excellence and whose work serves as a bench-

mark for the industry. There were 2,714 entries from 43 states in the competition.

"Farmington Public Schools: Together We Create the Future" won the Award of Distinction. The program is an informational video which focuses on how all age groups can be become involved in the school system. It covers topics like community education for seniors and committees of residents that help design local schools as well as the entire school district.

The fine editing techniques demonstrated in the show were perfected by two very talented students, North Farmington Senior Jeremy Roth and Farmington Junior Jason Justman on the new state-of-the-art editing system.

In fact, "Farmington Public Schools: Together We Create the Future" was so well received, that TV-10 is producing a monthly program stemming from the same concept called "In Touch with Farmington Schools."

"North Farmington Homecoming" also won honorable mention in the sports category of the contest. The program was 100 percent student directed and crewed.

Dean and Sue, is it too late for me? Couldn't I just sneak in on one of your classes? It sounds like so much fun!

Mary Linda Calderone is the Community Outreach Coordinator for the Southwestern Oakland Cable Commission.

The next SWOCC meeting is 4:30 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 11, at Farmington City Hall. The next CAC meeting is 7 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 11, at SWOCC.

CABLE CONNECTION



MARY CALDERONE

Rebate Sale

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