



# Drive Up Standards

# NEWSLETTER

Connecting School Bus & Transit Workers From Coast to Coast

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## Teamster Organizing: The Lifeblood of Higher Standards in Our Industry

by Sue Pritchard, Local 987  
(Edmonton, Alberta, Canada)



School bus drivers are special people. Music to us is the sound of children laughing, singing and having a good time. But at the beginning of every school year there never seems to be enough drivers for our children. What can

we do to stop this trend? I believe it's organizing all school bus companies in my area. Educating school bus drivers on the importance of joining the Teamsters is a priority for me, that's why I'm actively organizing four non-union companies operating in Edmonton.

Since the time drivers came together with Local 987, we've received an hourly rate of pay. Sounds funny that I would mention that but there are drivers working for other companies here in Edmonton that just get a daily base rate regardless of how many hours they work in a day and they receive no additional pay for the extra training needed for special needs children. Under our contract, regular route drivers earn \$20.64 an hour, special needs route drivers receive \$21.79 an hour and all drivers are paid for all time worked.

We also receive a 100 percent company funded Health Spending Account. Every January \$300 is deposited into an account so that we can be reimbursed for wide ranging health-related expenses

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## Local 120 First Transit Drivers: A Closer Look

Cities, counties and even state agencies across the country contract with bus companies to provide all sorts of passenger transportation services. The more than 800 Teamsters members at Local 120 serve the many diverse transportation needs of people in their communities. With locations across the state of Minnesota, First Transit drivers brilliantly take on the job of suburban transit. Teamsters at First Transit operate Dial-A-Ride, Metro-mobility, and a few fixed routes as well. These drivers are the only source of transportation for many Minnesotans. Teamsters Local 120 sat down and interviewed a wide range of First Transit drivers. Every single driver, without fail, radiated a love for their job and a passion for helping people. Here are their stories:



### George Dinsmore

*First Transit Driver - Spring St.*

*I like the interaction with people, helping people get from one place to another. I think the Teamsters look after everybody. I'm the steward, and I like helping people, looking out for their rights and making sure that they're treated decently; I enjoy working with the union.*

*I used to be a senior financial aid counselor to a computer school. When high-tech jobs began to get outsourced to India, I was laid off. I decided I'd like to find out if I could drive a transit bus or not. I've been with transit ever since. I like to drive. I don't like sitting at a desk, I don't like working with a computer. I get to go to work, drive, do little or no paperwork and go home – all while making a good income.*



### Julie Whitfield

*First Transit Driver - Blaine*

*I'm up and out of the shop by 5 a.m. to pick up the people at Brooklyn Center Transit Center near Minneapolis. After that, I bring them across the river, where they start making connections to other MTC bus lines. The*

*thing that makes or breaks the job is the people. Luckily for me, the people on my route are very appreciative that they have a bus service going*

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## A Closer Look continued from page 1

through their neighborhoods to bring them to the store, or to get medications, or do whatever it is they need to do.

I like the Teamsters because they provide support if there is a challenge on site. I worked for a bank for more than forty years. As we went through a merger my job was eliminated. I was at home feeling sorry for myself and pouting. My husband made me finally get up and get out one day – he said, "enough of this, come on!" We went outside and I saw a transit bus. I thought to myself, "I could drive that!" I've been here ever since.



**Greg Tvedt**  
**First Transit Driver - Roseville**

My day starts at around 5:00am. I punch the clock around 5:05, do pre-trip on my vehicle, and leave the yard at 5:15. The most interesting thing that happens to me on the job is that

I get to meet different people. I treat everybody the same whether they're deaf, blind, handicapped, elderly, whatever. It's just interesting to see how many smiles I can put on peoples face's for picking them up. It's like I'm doing them a favor by getting them to their appointments on time.

The Teamsters are a brotherhood of many different trades, and we unite together as one when the going gets tough. It's nice to belong to something that stands for the right things, and that you believe in.



**Mark Place**  
**Metro Mobility Driver - Burnsville**

Many customers are in wheelchairs, some might be elderly, blind, developmentally disabled, etc. You meet a lot of people – I've met people that are 98 years old and you wouldn't even know it by looking at them. All sorts of different personalities ride Metro Mobility.

I like the independence, you don't have your supervisor right there looking over you. I get to meet a lot of people; I get to see the city, drive around and talk to people. I think the Teamsters give us more negotiating power for wages and benefits. I've very rarely been in a union and I've always wanted to be, but most jobs aren't union anymore. It is hard to find a union job.



**Becky Huntington**  
**First Transit Driver - Southwest**

Right now I'm driving a small cutaway and I do the prime, which is essentially a Dial-A-Ride. We call it prime. I'm pretty busy all day long catching rides. It's the people that make the job. It's not just the company or where you work – it's the people.

I like the Teamsters because I know I have bargaining power. I know that without being in the Teamsters we are at-will employees, and we can get fired just for looking at somebody the wrong way. I've been with the Teamsters for 19 years.



**Mohamed Elgharbawi**  
**Delta Airlines Driver**

I transport Delta Airline employees from the airport to the parking lot where they park their cars. I like driving and meeting the people all the time. It's interesting to hear a different story every day and we got a lot of nice people. We hear different stories every day from the Flight Attendants and Pilots, that's what I like.

Before we had the Teamsters union, a lot of drivers would be threatened by the company to lose their jobs. If you had something to talk to the manager about they would say whether you like it or not that is the way it is. Now, since they know we have a union, they watch what they say and what they do before they do it. So you get to have your rights with the company.



**Stephen Walther**  
**First Transit Driver - Como, the University of Minnesota**

When I get to work in the morning I'll go pull out buses for everybody to drive. After that, we'll head out to our stops, pick up people, try to be friendly, watch all of our traffic on the transit way. Basically just make the rounds. I enjoy just getting to know a lot of the passengers, you know- students and faculty, I enjoy that. I think the Teamsters are a good group. I was in a different union for 33 years, so I get to see both sides. I think the Teamsters do a good job of organizing and taking care of the people.

These Teamsters work tirelessly to aid their communities in Minnesota and ensure that those who need it most have access to transportation. Teamsters Local 120 is proud to represent the people who make getting from place to place possible for so many in our community. These drivers represent everything wonderful about the Teamsters: hard workers, a love for their union, and a desire to do their part to help people who need it.



### Chicagoland Teamsters Make Strides Against Cancer

By Phyllis Pepper, Local 777

*Hello Teamster members! Happy holidays to you and your family.*

*On October, 21 2017 I decided to do the Making Strides of Chicago Cancer Walk at Soldier Field. When I asked my fellow Teamster members to walk with me, the response I got was overwhelming. Not only was Joint Council 25 able to put together a team of walkers in the fight against cancer, but my co-workers even wore pink to support the cause! I was so proud of my fellow Teamster bus drivers, and I think that their generosity and kindness really exemplifies what Teamster solidarity is all about. I was able to raise over \$225 in donations for the American Cancer Society (ACS). I even received a cape from the ACS as recognition for all of the money that I raised.*



*I want to thank all that supported me and everyone that contributed and did the walk. This disease has no name, race, or religion, so get tested! By*

*banding together as Teamster members to fight this terrible disease, we can save lives throughout the world.*



### Building the School Bus Movement Throughout New Hampshire

by Jean Heilman, Local 633

Having driven school buses for a long time, it's been great to see Teamster organizing in New Hampshire start from the ground up. A lot of companies have come and gone, but the Teamsters have been there for us through thick and thin.

I became a union member back in 1997 as an employee of Laidlaw (now First Student). When STA took over the town of Windham's contract, I was very thankful that we were still union. The move was a little hard at the beginning, since we were one of the first STA yards in New Hampshire to be union. Now, it's great. We get along with the management so well, working together, and not against one other.

We were able to keep our seniority and the benefits that we already had earned. The drivers realized how important it was to be union. We know that it's not just about the money: it's also about job security and seniority.

Recently, one of our coworkers was just diagnosed with a very serious illness and she will likely be taking a leave of absence. Thankfully, our union contract includes a portion of our healthcare to be paid for by the company. That means that even if she is out of work for an extended period of time, under the FMLA act, the company will be paying for health insurance for at least 90 days. After the 90 days is over she can stay on the health plan and still receive the contribution from the company because of our union contract.

The non-union drivers have started to notice the better wages and benefits we receive, and they've expressed interest in joining the Teamsters. I'm also glad to report that the town of Londonderry, which is also an STA yard, just voted to go union. They saw our benefits package, and they wanted in. Other towns in New Hampshire are also organizing with the Teamsters. It's funny, but some management actually likes the way the union works. Without favoritism, everything is much easier to work with.

With more and more school bus drivers throughout New Hampshire learning about the benefits of Teamster membership, we are expanding the reach and power of our movement to improve working conditions in our industry. I'm proud to be a Teamster member for the last twenty years, and I look forward to what the future holds!



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such as our driver's medical exam, eye exam and dental and prescription costs. The HSA is a major win—no other school bus companies in Edmonton receive any form of company-paid health benefits.

The *Drive Up Standards* campaign is not just about benefiting drivers who are

Teamsters, it builds up the industry standard as well. Every time a company organizes with the Teamsters it's a win for all. Organizing more bus drivers with the Teamsters will create a stable, healthy workforce for our children's busing needs. My goal is to organize more school bus drivers with the Teamsters to

ensure drivers' voices are heard by employers, school boards and various levels of government. School bus drivers are community service providers. By coming together we can bring a better quality of life to drivers as they partner in supporting children, families and our communities on a daily basis.



### Heroes in Our Time of Need – Fuelers and Mechanics Stand Strong with Teamster Drivers

*by Denyele Morris, Local 554*

**O**ur mechanics and fuelers at Student Transportation of America (STA) out of Omaha North Base are true heroes to everyone in our yard during our time of need!

Our buses are about five years old, and with all of the starting and stopping they do on their routes, their parts are beginning to need routine maintenance. Our mechanics, Hector and Tony, go above and beyond the call of duty. In heat or cold, wind or rain, they work to repair our buses. They meet us when the bus breaks down, and no matter what they drive out in their pick-up trucks to come fix it. Tony always keeps our company pick-up truck well stocked with supplies. When our supply shed was broken into and parts were

stolen, Hector was willing to drive seven miles both ways to our satellite location to get the parts he needed to repair our buses. Now that's dedication!

Brian, Claudia and Sean, our fuelers, come early in the morning or in the evening. They meet the call of duty no matter what the weather is so they can refuel our buses. Despite all of these obstacles, our mechanics and fuelers do a tremendous job keeping our buses up and running!

Our mechanics and fuelers stand in solidarity with us, and we stand in solidarity with them. Since STA took over the OPS bus transportation contract North Base, they have said that a building would be built with a mechanics shop to protect them from the weather, but this has not happened yet. The bargaining unit has been pushing the company on their behalf to get them what they were promised, and we will keep fighting for them until they get the workspace they deserve. Two years ago, it came to my attention that the mechanics and fuelers were not getting their contracted pay and tool allowance. I showed them in the collective bargaining agreement where it said that this pay was guaranteed, and then I contacted our Business Agent at Local 554. The union contacted STA right away, asking for full back pay and reimbursement, which Hector and Tony received on their next paycheck. Because of our Teamster contract, we did not have to fight with the company.

We are happy that the mechanics and fuelers are making a fair wage and that they have a tool allowance, but us drivers believe they still should be making some kind of bonus like we do! We can push for that in our next round of contract negotiations. For Christmas this year, all of us collected donations so we could pitch in and get them gift cards. They take such great care of our buses and everyone at our yard, and we wanted to give them a BIG THANK YOU!

**Have a question or story idea?**  
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