



Drive Up Standards

NEWSLETTER

Connecting School Bus & Transit Workers From Coast to Coast

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A Message from François Laporte

President, Teamsters Canada



To All of Our Brothers and Sisters Across the Passenger Transportation Industry:

I would like to congratulate you on all of the successes you have brought to our union, and I would also like to thank you for sharing your stories in this publication. Your stories show how much we can accomplish with solidarity and teamwork. It's already led to industry-leading contracts that set safety standards for workers and the passengers under your care.

Unfortunately, too many companies are all talk and no action when it comes to safety and maintenance. As Teamster sister Sue Pritchard described in her piece, without the backing of a strong union, workers are alone and powerless to confront managers on important issues.

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TEAMSTER POWER IN THE GATEWAY TO THE NORTH

by Sue Pritchard, Local 987

My journey with Local 987 in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada started in the fall of 2006. I was, and still am, an experienced school bus driver. Back then I was working for a small family-run business where the workers' safety concerns were addressed. When the owners retired, they sold the company to a large conglomerate, First Student LLC.

I knew that safety and maintenance on our buses should be a top priority. Unfortunately, my idea and the company's idea of safety were very different. As a single voice that was trying to stand up to them, I felt alone.

The school bus that I was using in the beginning of this transition had low tire tread, but not low enough for the new company to do anything about it. One of our mechanics would come out with a sheet of paper which had a line marked on it—the tread had to be below the line before it could be replaced. Oddly enough, the company's motto is, "If it's not safe, don't do it."

That night I went home and spoke with my husband, who is a proud Teamster. I told him my concerns.

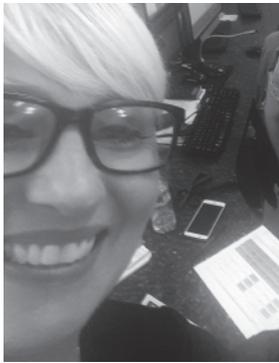
"If you were a Teamster that never would happen!" my husband replied.

Within a week, two Local 987 business agents and four fellow drivers were having coffee and cake in my living room. With help and advice from these business agents, we set up a plan and started the process of gathering signatures to organize our site.

We began by going door-to-door and explaining to our fellow drivers the need for a strong union. Soon our momentum picked up, and we went from organizing one yard to organizing all five yards—from organizing around 100 employees to organizing more than 500 drivers. We succeeded! But only a few days before our vote to join the Teamsters, the Alberta Labour Board accepted the company's argument and ruled that mechanics and dispatchers would also be included in the union election. Expanding the pool of workers on short notice was a challenge, but we

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The Teamsters "Drive Up Standards" newsletter is by and for school bus drivers, monitors and mechanics. This newsletter is published quarterly in print and online at www.driveupstandards.org.



Uncharted Waters: Negotiating Our First Teamster Contract

by Lisa Abarr, Local 853

I'm a customer service representative at First Transit in Redwood City, Calif. While I have many Teamster brothers and sisters, I'm also proud to say I work alongside my mother! During

the time that my mother and I have worked here, we have been a key part of both bringing the Teamsters to our jobs and securing our first contract. Fighting for our union has been difficult, but then again, the most worthwhile things in life often tend to be that way.

The environment at First Transit before the Teamsters came in was less than ideal, to say the least. The company was paying us as little as humanly possible. Management looked down on us and was regularly disrespectful. Illegal labor practices were not uncommon. It was obvious we needed a union.

Bringing the Teamsters into our shop was tough. Management regularly told us that it would never happen—and although it took more than one attempt to organize, we eventually proved them wrong. Winning our union election and knowing that we would finally be able to compete with our bosses on a level playing field was exhilarating—but we were about to find out that the real work was just beginning.

After we served on the organizing committee, my mother and I moved to the negotiating committee. The biggest challenge we encountered was the learning curve for management: even though we had voted overwhelmingly to be represented by the union, they didn't always want to play by the rules. We stood strong, though. After the first round of negotiations, we added more members to the committee, and the experience led us to realize we could achieve more by banding together and exercising power in numbers. Toward the end, we brought in a mediator, and we hammered out an agreement that was amenable to everyone.

The contract we secured was a great milestone. Not only was it our first contract, it was the first contract for transit dispatchers and supervisors that the Teamsters have ever negotiated. Our contract was ratified by a five-to-one margin with 75 percent of our bargaining unit participating in the election. We received a 15 percent reduction in our health and welfare costs as well as significant wage increases over the next three years, including a 6 percent raise during our first year. Perhaps most importantly, we guaranteed in writing the things that we had fought so hard for in the first place—job security, a grievance procedure and a way to stand up for our rights on the job.

If there's one thing I've learned from this, it is that you should know your worth, and no matter what, always live by your moral compass. Just because you have a hierarchy in management doesn't mean your position is any less than theirs, so even if your views are unpopular or inconvenient to management, stand by what you believe and never falter!



Contract Negotiations: What to Do When it's Not Your First Rodeo

By Phyllis Pepper, Local 777

Welcome back to school Teamster members!

I'm a steward working out of First Student in South Holland, Ill. Our contract ends June 2018, so it's negotiation time again!

This will be our third contract at South Holland. For our Teamster members who have been here for over ten years, we know the drill—we're looking to not only preserve what we've gained in prior negotiations, but build on it. For this contract, we need to update our pay rates to better reflect seniority, so our members are getting paid according to years of service. In order to get that, and other things that we want and need, we need to be united and involved every step of the way. The last two contract negotiations have taught us that the more the membership is involved in the process, the better the contract is for everyone in the end.

The first contract is the most difficult, but also the most important. Chances are you just won union recognition, and there's a learning curve for both management and the membership. You're feeling each other out and finding out together what it means to be in a union workplace. You're also looking to set a precedent for future contracts.

It's not easy sitting at the table, but we need to be represented, so put your ideas on paper and give them to your steward during the contract proposal period. Make sure you are writing down things that are important to you. Come to meetings! Your input is important because the committee will voice your concerns when we are at the table with the company. Our contract determines our working conditions for the length of that contract, so we need to stand strong and be heard!

Staying Strong through Changing Times: 30 Years of Service in the School Bus Industry

By Donna LeMay, Local 633

Most people will ask, "Who do you drive for?" Years ago, the answer would have been a mom-and-pop small business or the school district itself. But since then, more and more school districts are privatizing their transportation. Most of those smaller companies have been scooped up by bigger businesses like First Group, National Express or Student Transportation of America (STA).

I first began driving in 1988. Back then I was hired by McGregor Smith Motor Co., a small operator. The company was eventually bought by DBA Laidlaw, but they kept the company name. Laidlaw would eventually be bought by First Student, who I currently work for. Things under McGregor Smith Motor Co., were pretty good, but after the company was bought by Laidlaw, the family-friendly atmosphere eventually dissolved.

As with all big businesses, there were changes when new management came in. Rule books came out of the closet. Some managers who had been in the business for years still tried to work with the drivers, but others became power hungry and tried to push us around. The company used the old management for a while then slowly phased them out. The workers would still respect them, but morale was low when the company continually said, "We can't give you a raise this year." One thing I heard a lot from my manager for Laidlaw was, "My hands are tied."

When First Student took over from Laidlaw, things didn't get much better. They bought Laidlaw's outdated, cheap equipment and kept bus maintenance issues hidden from upper management. We were asked to drive buses that we knew were not supposed to be on the road, but we were told they had nothing else. We couldn't open rear emergency windows because they could break. We had emergency seats that didn't pop up right away. One year during inspections the state cited drivers for problems on buses that the company told us were OK to drive. This was especially hard for us because after a citation you are unable to drive a bus for 30 days. The company was getting a warning, but we were the recipients. Turnover was high, and we wanted something big to change.

My fellow drivers and I learned quickly that we were a commodity in more ways than one. When we were under Laidlaw, the company spent a lot of time and energy trying to convince not to join a union—T-shirts, dinners, things like that. The problems weren't getting better though, and the turnover for drivers continued until we fought together to join the Teamsters. As we matured as drivers and as union members, we began to push back and write up the issues we were having. We finally had a way to fight for our rights on the job and stand up for safer buses.

The union has been a big part of my career as a driver. I became a steward, and I even got a chance to meet fellow union drivers from England. At one point, when STA took over a contract from another company, I reached out to the workers and convinced them to keep their union membership. It worked! Those STA drivers are union to this day.

Bus drivers across North America: No matter who you work for, you deserve to be respected for the enormously important jobs you do. Parents depend on us to get their children to and from school every day. We make the wheels on the bus move. We earn the profits for the company. We fulfill the contracts they sign with districts. We take pride in our jobs protecting the children we transport.

I bet everyone reading this story could share stories about their experiences as a driver, just as I'm sharing my story right now. For that reason, the next time you see a driver who works for another company, say hello and remember to treat them the same way you would like to be treated. We have lots of information to share with each other, and it's time to share our stories and protect the job we all know and love to do. I know a thing or two about this—30 years and running should count for something!



A Message from François Laporte

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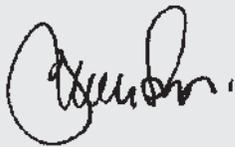
Because you care for the safety of children and community members that you transport, the responsibilities of a bus driver are greater than those of almost any other professional driver. Employers should treat you with the respect you deserve.

I'm glad that joining the Teamsters has empowered many of you to stand up to your employer and to work with your local union to negotiate better health and welfare benefits, and that throughout North America, Teamsters everywhere have secured guaranteed wage increases regardless of gender, race or nationality.

It's only by growing our union and empowering more bus drivers through the Teamsters that we can drive up standards for all bus drivers. The best way to do that is by sharing stories like the ones in this newsletter.

For all of the leaders of this union in the Passenger Transportation Division, your commitment to improving working conditions and safety is a commitment I share entirely. Know that you can count on the support of your local unions and all 125,000 of your fellow Teamsters across Canada.

In solidarity,



*François Laporte
President, Teamsters Canada*

Teamster Power

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managed to win the vote.

Improving on our collective bargaining agreement every time we negotiate with First Student rewards us with a more powerful and stronger voice. Our first agreement was a stepping stone: we won on safety; issues now had to be addressed and completed in a timely manner. Every three years since that vote, we have built stronger and better collective bargaining agreements. We won guaranteed wage increases regardless of our gender, race or nationality. A major difference with the Teamsters is the importance of seniority and the elimination of favoritism. Everybody feels equal on the job. Shop stewards are now in place to assist with enforcing our collective bargaining agreement. We're the only school bus drivers in Edmonton who have a health spending account, and it is a point of pride within our group.

Having a strong union behind us has given the drivers the confidence and ability to challenge managers to do the right thing. Over the course of 10 years the company has gone through numerous managers in the pursuit of a better working relationship with Teamster members.

Local 987 listens to our concerns: not just at our workplace but at our homes as well. This past year Local 987 has been working to change a city by-law. When amended, it will allow all school bus drivers the ability to park in front of our homes during school days.

Every year, unity at our work place gets stronger. Wins and losses are announced. Letters are placed in each bus with important issues and dates. We have a Facebook page where members can talk about their concerns and questions, and a shop steward can answer them quickly. A copy of these concerns and questions are then posted on our union board for the members who don't have Facebook. The more our members are aware of what's happening, the stronger we are.



TEAMSTER 
POWER 

How do we keep our union growing strong? By building political power, one member at a time, at every Teamster local union across North America.

Interested in joining DRIVE?
Talk to your local union.



Another Year of Driving Up Standards – Our Year in Review

By Rick Middleton, Teamster Passenger Transportation Division Director

Teamster Brothers and Sisters,

I'd like to welcome all of our Teamster bus members back from summer break. Whether you are transporting school children, our community members with special needs or even the airport shuttle, we all must continue the battle to drive up standards at our workplaces.

We continued to grow our membership with some big organizing victories over the summer. In August, workers at the Metropolis, Ill. Durham School Services yard stood strong in the face of harassing and misleading anti-union attacks from management to bring in the union and are now proud members of Local 50.

Teamster members have also had some big wins at the bargaining table. In May, Local 853 members at the Redwood City, Calif. First Transit yard negotiated our union's first contract that covers dispatchers and supervisors. We continue to be a dominant force in the Chicago-area— three contracts were ratified this summer that cover more than 400 Teamster school bus members. In Tucson, Ariz., Local 104 members overwhelmingly ratified a three-year agreement with SunTran. Two years ago, these members were forced to go on strike for 42 days to get the company to agree to a decent contract, but they stayed united and sent the company a message that resonates to this day.

All of the work you do at your yards is the backbone of the work we do nationally and internationally. That is why I am also so proud to announce the creation of the newest Teamster division, dedicated to supporting you and your work – the IBT Passenger Transportation Division. Thanks to the vision of our General President, James P. Hoffa, the new division will help to direct the resources we need to continue the fight to raise safety standards, combat wage theft, push for better pay and benefits, protect job security and give workers a voice on the job. It will pave the way to ensuring a union job in passenger transportation is a pathway to middle class prosperity.

Thank you for everything you've done, and keep up the good work! Your tireless commitment to your co-workers and the thousands of people who we transport across this country every day has led to better jobs, safer buses and a working-class social movement. We are transforming this industry and the lives of the workers who carry our most precious cargo in ways that never could have been imagined. We must continue to push on and demand the very best from each and every one of our employers. Our biggest challenges are yet to come, but we'll be ready for them and we'll be successful together.

Yours Truly,

Rick Middleton

Have a question or story idea?
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driveupstandards1@gmail.com

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