Going the DISTANCE

Tracie Englemeyer earns her living driving a bus for Special School District. But don’t tell her she’s just a bus driver. For her, getting students safely to school is only part of the job—a job she says she wouldn’t trade for anything.

“I hate when people say you’re just a bus driver,” Englemeyer says. “I am a safe driver, but you have so much more going on than driving a bus.”

On her two morning and afternoon routes, Englemeyer drives older students to South Technical High School and young special education students to Parkwood Elementary School in the Pattonville School District.

While delivering students curb-to-curb from home to school and back again, Englemeyer can be a mother or a mentor, a sympathetic ear or a shoulder to cry on, a smiling face to an unhappy child or stern disciplinarian to a rowdy teenager.

“I like dealing with the kids,” she says. “I see them the first thing in the morning, a disciplinary to a rowdy teenager. I teach them to respect everybody.”

Englemeyer says that on the flip side, if they have a bad day at school, they end their day.”

Englemeyer is one of 269 drivers and 177 bus monitors who annually drive about 5.4 million miles annually for the award-winning SSD Transportation Department. Englemeyer is one of 269 drivers and 177 bus monitors who annually drive about 5.4 million miles annually for the award-winning SSD Transportation Department.

In nominating her for the award, Transportation Supervisor Karen Sides described Englemeyer as an “excellent driver” who feels guilty if she misses a single day of work.

“Tracie gets to know the students that are on her bus and their parents and teachers,” Sides wrote. “She is a very caring and concerned driver. She handles whatever is thrown her way—be it behavior students being sent home on the late bus or tech students that want to test the limits—and can still give you one of her great smiles at the end of the day.”

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Volunteers Sought for Educational Surrogate Program

The state of Missouri and SSD are asking for volunteers to act as educational surrogates for special education students who are without a parent to represent them in educational decisions.

State and federal laws require that these students have surrogates. The greatest number of surrogates is needed for students who are in the legal custody of the Division of Family Services and reside in a residential facility.

Surrogate responsibilities include participating in the development of the student’s Individualized Education Plan (IEP), attending teacher conferences, and representing the child in complaint or due process procedures. The state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) provides training for volunteers serving as educational surrogates. The next training will be held from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on March 14 at SSD Central Administrative Offices.

Surrogates have no responsibility for physical or financial care of the student, nor are they liable for civil damages as a result of representing the student in educational decisions.

For more information about the Educational Surrogate Program or to sign up for training, contact Mary Lee Burlemann at 314.989.8124.

Bueneman Named Tech Prep Student of the Year

Stacy Bueneman is not only a good student, but also a good writer. Writing a story about North Technical High School senior Stacy Bueneman isn’t as easy as it sounds. Sure, finding good things to write about her is a piece of cake. But tracking her down for an interview? That’s another matter altogether.

You see, Stacy is a young woman constantly on the go.

As this year’s Tech Prep Student of the Year, it comes as no surprise that Stacy is a good student who works hard, but that description hardly does justice to her achievements. Stacy’s grade point average is through the roof (3.97), her community service hours are inspiring (250 at last count), and the list of clubs and organizations to which she belongs practically fills a page.

Stacy is studying network administration in the Cisco Networking Academy at North Tech. Her teacher Jim Elkins describes her as a “superstar.”

Nevertheless, Stacy admits she was a little surprised when she was named Tech Prep Student of the Year. The honor is bestowed on one student each year from the SSD Technical Division, representing both North Technical High School and South Technical High School. “Mr. Elkins told me I had a really good shot for the award, but I’m not sure if I believed him,” she says. “It was a happy surprise.”

Stacy’s surprise was compounded when she recently learned that not only was she named Tech Prep Student of the Year among her North Tech and South Tech peers, but among all tech students throughout the St. Louis area. “That was wonderful,” Stacy says. “I wanted to get home really fast that day to tell my parents!”

Stacy admits she has come a long way since coming to North Tech at the beginning of her junior year. “I always loved computers, but I had only had one computer class before coming to North Tech,” she says. “When I got here, I felt really comfortable using a computer, but today I can get inside a computer. I understand them inside and out.”

Following graduation this May, Stacy plans to pursue a degree in information technology at the University of Missouri – St. Louis.

Heroes Among Us

In January, SSD joined school districts around the country in celebrating Board Appreciation Month. In recognition of the board’s tireless work in support of the district, members were treated to a multi-media presentation. The board also received a copy of a comic created by SSD students in which each was featured as a superhero, and care packages and cards from students and staff from around the district.