

She delivers 'precious cargo' each day

By **BRANDY LEROUX**
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Donna Tanner, a bus driver for Norton schools, considers her job "transporting someone else's precious cargo" and a huge responsibility.

Mrs. Tanner and her husband, Steve, operate a farm in rural Norton County. They're both school bus drivers and share a bus route. Mr. Tanner generally drives in the morning and drives the activities bus, and Mrs. Tanner takes the afternoon route. Mrs. Tanner is the only full-time female school bus driver for Norton. She said finding school bus drivers can be difficult because it interrupts the day, though she only works about 25 hours a week.

She has been a Norton bus driver for 23 years. She has had different routes over the years, and now drives the handicap bus. The bus she drives can seat 11 elementary students plus two wheelchairs. For the wheelchairs, there are four-point tie-downs and a shoulder and lap harness.

"It has its rewards and challenges," she said. "But this is really a good group of kids."

Mrs. Tanner said she always tries to have a smile for the kids, to be supportive and cheerful for them.

She has to take yearly training to continue to be a bus driver, including defensive driving update classes, first aid refresher courses, monthly safety meetings and random drug testing. Drivers also have to perform an inspection at least once a day, like making sure the lights work, checking the tires and making sure they have the correct amount of air, and engine fluid levels.

One part of the job that isn't so great is when a child gets sick on a bus.

"The bus drivers are responsible for keeping their buses clean," said Mrs. Tanner. "Both inside and out."

"Fall harvest can get really hectic, but Steve and I are a team," she said. "More than once, I have been stuck in line at the co-op, waiting to unload my grain, and it was almost time to pick up the kids. I had to call Steve and let him know I wasn't going to be able to make it. He drove my route for me that afternoon. We cover each other whenever we need to."

Handling biohazards is a big change she has seen. She said there are a lot more rules and regulations for dealing with biohazards than

there were when she started.

Mrs. Tanner said she has only been stuck in the mud three times in 23 years. When a school bus does get stuck, the driver uses an FM radio to call the transportation director, who handles it from there.

"The roads are a lot better than they used to be," she said. "There are hardly any bad roads

now. You stay off the bad roads when it's muddy or snowy."

She said she doesn't mind working with guys.

"They're great to work with," she said. "There's always somebody to help you out. They all give 110 percent. We all get along really well.

Maybe one of the best perks of her job is that her grandkids live close to her, and are on her bus route.

In her spare time, Mrs. Tanner likes vegetable and flower gardening, working with animals, walking their dogs, crocheting, reading and oil painting.



Donna Tanner is a bus driver for Norton schools. In addition to transporting kids to and from school, she also takes high school students to and from the wrestling room.

- Telegram photo by Brandy Leroux



From left, Sandy Worden, Missi Schoen, Cherie Keiswetter, Deanna Georgeson

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