

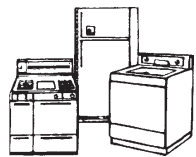
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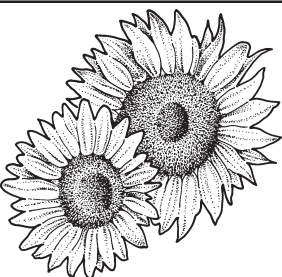
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Gerry Osterman reached to close the doors on the school bus she drives every morning. Osterman has been driving a school bus in Sherman County for 37 years — longer than any other bus drivers. Photo by Rachel Miscall/The Goodland Daily News

# Bus driver has seen change

By Rachel Miscall

*The Goodland Daily News*  
A lot has changed since Gerry Osterman started driving a school bus in Sherman County 37 years ago.

The roads are in much better condition, the buses are safer and easier to drive and the job pays more. But the biggest change, Osterman says, is in the students who ride the bus.

"The kids have really changed," she said. "Back then, when you told them something they kind of listened to you. They weren't as rowdy. Now they don't do what you say."

Nancy Zimbelman, who has been driving a school bus for the Goodland district since 1977, said it's because students these days aren't as intimidated by adults.

"They're not as scared of you now," she said. "Times have changed that way."

Zimbelman said the bus drivers still handle discipline problems the same way. "You just holler," she said.

When school started on Monday, it didn't just signal the start of the fall sports season in Goodland, but the beginning of yellow bus season.

During the school year, bus drivers spend four to five hours each day rolling around the city and county, transporting students to and from school. Many arrive at the bus barn in east Goodland as early as 5:30 a.m. and have a second job to get to by 8 a.m.

Bob Harkins, transportation supervisor, said the Goodland district employs 11 bus drivers, three substitute drivers and one dispatcher. All of the drivers have been working for the district for more than two years, and more than half have over 10 years under their belt.

Harkins said it's hard to find good bus drivers, but once you do, they usually stick with the job for a long time.

"We probably have about as good of a record of people staying on as anywhere in town," he said. "The only reasons we've lost people is because they find a full-time job they need or they move out of town."

So what's the draw? The bus drivers agree the students are the best and worst aspects of the job.

"I like being around the kids," said Mary Zimmerman, who has two children of her own, Chris, a recent high school graduate; and Mike, a junior.

Zimmerman, who has been a bus driver for 11 years, said she's in charge of transporting disabled students. She said she's been driving most of the students to school since they were 3, and over the years, they've developed a close relationship.

"They're my kids and I treat them as my kids," Zimmerman said, "and they know they have to do what I say."

Zimbelman and Osterman, who have been

driving a school bus in Sherman County longer than anyone else, said while the kids can try their patience at times, it's still a fun and rewarding job.

"It's an adventure everyday," said Osterman. "We must like it, or we wouldn't keep doing it."

Osterman said she first started driving a bus when her children entered school. One reason she stuck with it, she said, was to show her husband she could.

"My husband said 'You won't last 1 year,'" she said, "and I thought, 'I'll show him.' Thirty-seven years later, I'm still doing it."

It can be a peaceful job at times, she said. "I really like it in the mornings," said Osterman, who drives 18 miles to Kanorado to pick up students. "The sun is coming up, the animals are out."

In all the years they've been driving, Zimbelman and Osterman said, they've each only had one minor accident, and neither was at fault. Zimbelman attributes it to the defensive driving course all bus drivers are required to take every three years. Osterman said the drivers also have to take first aid and cardio pulmonary resuscitation classes every year.

The two women said they've learned a few things about driving on county roads in wet weather. Namely, don't do it.

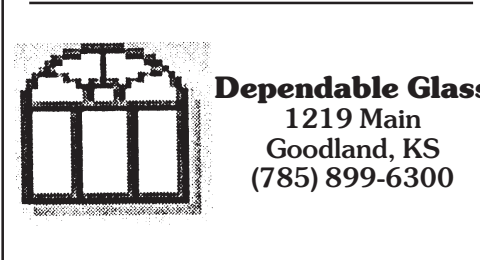
"We've gotten stuck a few times," Zimbelman said.



Goodland School District transportation staff includes (back row, left to right) Bob Harkins, district transportation director; bus drivers Jim Stewart, 18 years, Gary Ginther, 3 years, Wanda Schritter, 10 years, Donna Morris, 6, Nancy Zimbelman, 25, Karen Isaac, 23; and Kent Scofield, dispatcher, 10 years. (Front row, left to right) Rick Murray, 10; Marshall Hatfield, 5; Dale Neill, 3; Gerry Osterman, 37; Mary Zimmerman, 11. Not pictured, substitute drivers Sue Cude, 4; T.J. Martin, 8; and Neil Schritter, 10.



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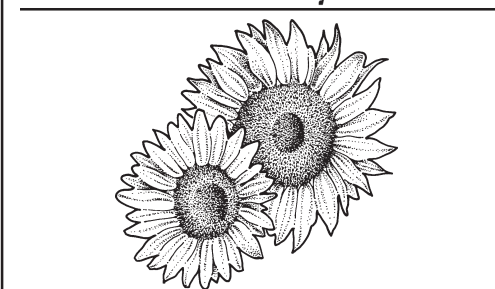


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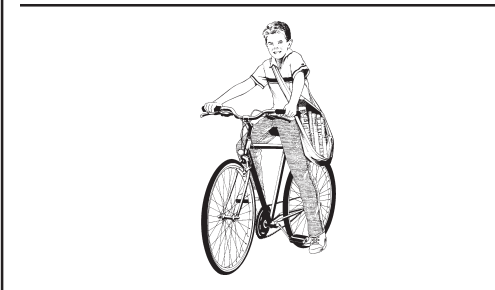
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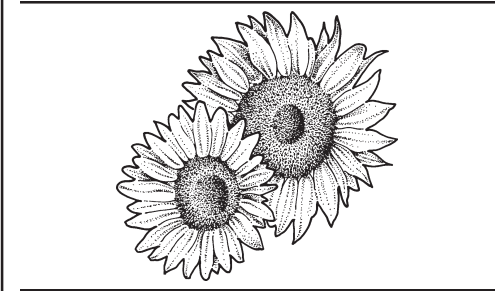
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