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Drivers looking over shoulders?

Safety director eagle-eyed

By BRUCE STAPLEY

If you see a Simcoe School Transit driver glancing over his/her shoulder, he or she is probably looking for Kathy Winterflood.

The Stouffville woman, Director of Safety for the Gormley-based bus line, is constantly on the 'prowl', making sure all drivers do things by the book.

There's nothing Kathy won't do to guarantee the safety of her company's cargo.

"We have an extremely high standard of safety," she says proudly. "we take no short-cuts when it comes to children's lives."

Logical extension

Kathy admits to a life-long fascination with everything on wheels. Her position with Simcoe is a logical extension of this interest.

"I've always loved vehicles — anything that moves," she smiles. "I had a go-kart and a motorcycle when I was young."

Kathy was a driver with Travelways nine years. This gave her ample opportunity to learn the rights and wrongs of the profession.

From there, she went on to dispatch and payroll and then accepted the responsibilities of driver training.

"You name it, I've done it," she says. "I've even helped in the garage."

Kathy joined the Simcoe firm to fill a position recently created, that of Safety Director.

Growing rapidly

"The company was growing rapidly," she recalls. "With safety being such a high priority with school boards and parents, the position was established."

Kathy points to Simcoe's driver training program with pride. "It's one of the best. We have signing authority with the Ministry of Transportation and Communications. Our standards exceed even what the MTC demands."

However, Kathy's not content to rest on her laurels. "You can never let down your defenses," she insists. "This is not just



Kathy Winterflood, safety director for Simcoe Coach Lines, takes her job seriously. She's constantly monitoring performance by school bus drivers to make sure they're following all the safety rules. —Bruce Stapley

another job; there's no room for error."

In support of this fact, Kathy's on the job from seven in the morning to sometimes six o'clock at night, ensuring that each driver takes his/her job as seriously as she takes hers.

On occasions, she checks up on some of her drivers even before she leaves her house. "A few live just across the road from me," she explains. "I can see them doing their 'circle checks' from my window."

First responsibility

A 'circle check' is a driver's first responsibility before setting out on the route. He or she makes sure all lights and signals are working properly.

Kathy spends three-quarters of her time each day on the road. She checks various routes as well as pick-up and delivery spots. She'll keep an eye on driv-

ers to make sure they're following all the rules.

With 350 bus operators spanning an area that includes Gormley, Sutton and Columbus, Kathy has miles of ground to cover. But she does it so efficiently and so regularly, drivers tell her they always assume she's right behind them.

She stops them

"It's an incentive to do everything by the book," she claims. On occasions, she'll borrow someone else's car so she won't be recognized.

What happens if she catches someone in the act of a faux pas?

"If it's a safety matter, I'll stop them. However, if it's something minor, I'll just invite them in for a coffee, then do a follow-up a month later just to make sure they're on track."

Often, operators express

appreciation of having small flaws detected, sometimes mistakes of which they're not aware. The company is continually emphasizing upgrading of driver skills.

"Our drivers attend winter training classes and take defensive driving courses," she says.

Kathy takes great pride in pointing to company records that show not a single major accident since she's taken charge of the safety program. She gives credit where credit is due.

"We hold a safety banquet every year for our drivers," she explains. Those who qualify, receive Driver Award Pins covering a 12-month period. Operators share this pride. "They work hard for their awards," she says.

Kathy's greatest concern relates to automobile drivers and their attitude towards school buses.

"Perhaps everyone should drive a school bus for a month," she states, "they'd be more aware of the responsibilities involved."

Kathy's role changes very little during the summer vacation months. Simcoe provides 130 buses for summer schools and camps. This arrangement is ideal for drivers with children. They can work when their kids are in school and take time off during holidays.

Concerned about attitude

Kathy says several drivers are parents of pre-schoolers. "This is great," she explains, "they can strap the infant into the seat right behind them." This serves as an incentive to drive carefully, she notes. "No cargo could be more important than one's own child."

When Simcoe's super-snooper decides she needs a break, she calls on one of several trainees to spell her off.

As for her reputation as a hungry hound on the scent of a defenseless rabbit, Kathy says that's not the way it is at all.

"It's not my desire to embarrass anyone," she insists. "I only want to catch minor mistakes before they develop into major accidents."

Weedless Wednesday Limericks
 C-3

Housewife and proud of it
 C-4, C-5

Community Calendar

Bruce Stapley
 C-8