



SETTING THE STANDARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN STUDENT TRANSPORTATION

# STS EXPRESS

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## RODEO EDITION



Past President Ingrid Reitano and Ruth Forman arrive to open the 40<sup>th</sup> Annual N.J. Rodeo. Ruth competed in the first Rodeo in 1971. See the article on her memories of early Rodeos on page 4.

### New Jersey Safety Competition, "The Rodeo," Celebrates 40 Years

On the last day of April, after months of preparation by a very dedicated committee, the 40<sup>th</sup> Annual New Jersey School Bus Driver Safety Competition, known as the Rodeo, was held at Six Flags, Great Adventure in Jackson, New Jersey.

The School Bus Safety Committee, chaired by Gretchen Biancone-Groff (East Brunswick School District) was responsible for planning and executing the full day event.

Gretchen was assisted by Al Olkowitz (Jackson School District,) STS Past President Ingrid Reitano (Monroe Township School District,) and a host of other dedicated volunteers from both school districts and school bus companies.

Planning for the Rodeo begins in earnest in October. Meetings are held monthly or more frequently and each one produces a daunting to-do list. The long hours paid a huge dividend when the competition was a success the volunteers can be proud of.

The competition started at 8 A.M. when the competitors walked through the driving course with the judges. This is especially helpful to first time competitors who come to the competition not knowing exactly what to expect. After that, there were four events to be completed.

- A written exam on New Jersey State laws, rules, and regulations;
- An interview with State Police Officers;
- A vehicle inspection test; and
- A driving skills test.

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In addition, there is always a surprise event. This year the surprise event was handled by State Police Officers Karen Kaufman and Gino Daddaras, who quizzed the drivers on cell phone use on school buses.



Tina Richardson and Ruth Foster of Rockaway Township model the 2011 Roadeo T-Shirt that was given to every competitor.

The registration fee included a ticket to Great Adventure Six Flags Park. Tickets were good until the park closed that evening, but lucky drivers finished with the competition early enough to go to the park before the Banquet and Awards Ceremony at 5:00 o'clock.

At the Awards Ceremony, trophies were awarded to drivers who placed first, second, and third in the transit, convention, and van categories. Additional awards were given to the drivers who finished with the three highest overall scores. The overall first place driver received \$500 and an expense paid trip to the International Roadeo, which is being held in Baltimore, Maryland this summer. The second place award was \$200 and the third place award was \$100. (See page 5 for a list of all the winners.)

The top finisher in each category has the right to represent STS at the international event at their own expense.

The same year the New Jersey Roadeo was started (1971), the National School Transportation Association (NSTA) held its first National School Bus Road-e-o. The competition is now called the School Bus Driver International Safety Competition, and attracts drivers from the United States and Canada. NSTA says the competition provides positive media coverage for the safety and security of the school bus industry.

Rockaway Township drivers Gina Palmieri and Ruth Foster, who placed first and second in the transit category last year, went to the 2010 International Roadeo in St.

Louis, Missouri. They report that there were only two events in the international competition, the written exam and the driving skills event, as compared to the four events in the New Jersey competition.

Why would eighty-four school bus drivers converge on a parking lot on a beautiful spring Saturday? For many, it's all about being competitive. The most serious among them are there to win the trip to the International Roadeo. Others have less ambitious but equally important goals, such as being in the top ten or beating their own scores from previous years. Some drivers enjoy the camaraderie and getting together with other drivers. And others make it a family day, taking advantage of discount tickets for the Six Flags Great Adventure Amusement Park.

Janet Lubaszka of Hunterdon Central Regional High School District said for her the easiest part of the competition is the written exam, because your answers are either right or wrong. The hardest part of competing is overcoming nerves or "stage fright" as she put it. Although winning would be great, she doesn't need to win to feel confident in her own driving skills. Ultimately, the Roadeo is fun for her.

For Janet, the hardest part of being a school bus driver is coming to terms with her responsibility for the safety of the students on her bus.

Janet gets personal satisfaction from competing in the Roadeo, and affirmation of her skills as a school bus driver. She says she will probably be back to compete next year.

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Janet Lubaszka with her co-workers from Hunterdon Central Regional School District: Joann Tange, Mike Salvato, Lisa Polenz, Kathy Scaturro, (Safety Specialist), Janet and Bob Collins. Missing from the picture is Sue Gouldey, (Manager). JoAnn took second place in the conventional category. Lisa placed third in the van category.

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This was the third Roadeo for Sheila Dowling of First Student, Glen Gardner. She was accompanied by Mary Dillinger, the winner of two Roadeos and her driver trainer. Sheila laughed as she said she would like to beat her trainer's scores!

The written test and alley parking are the hardest part of the competition for Sheila. The easiest part is having fun. She likes to make new friends at the Roadeo. She expects to gain experience and learn something every time she competes. After driving a school bus for fifteen years, she feels comfortable with the student management part of her job. The hard part of driving a school bus is anticipating what could happen down the road. Sheila plans to come back to the Roadeo next year.

Josh Keaveney of Lower Cape May BOE says driving a school bus is in his blood. His grandmother, who lived and worked on a farm, owned a school bus company for fifty years. Josh has competed five times, but because of recent back surgery could not compete this year. He was at Great Adventure with eight coworkers to cheer for one of Lower Cape May's drivers, after which they were all going to the park to enjoy the rides. He finds the written exam the hardest part of the competition and driving the easiest part. He likes to finish in at least a top ten position, which he did when he competed last year.

Josh believes practicing and competing make him a better driver. Asked what his favorite part of driving a school bus is, Josh responded: "I love the kids."



*Gretchen Biancone-Groff and Don Harms flank the Roadeo winners.*

Gretchen would like to say "thank you" to everyone who played a part, had a hand, helped, judged, ran score sheets, ran water, scored, organized score sheets, registered drivers, sold tee shirts, attended meetings, collected monies or just stepped up when an extra hand was needed.

In addition, the STS Board of Directors would like to thank all the judges and contestants who attended the event for giving up their day to participate in this safety event and encourage more transportation supervisors to get their drivers in next year's Roadeo.

### **Student Inclusion Discussed at North Region Meeting**

Michelle Lockwood of the New Jersey Coalition for Inclusive Education (NJCIA) was the guest speaker at the April 8<sup>th</sup> North Region meeting. NJCIA is a non-profit group dedicated to the inclusion of students with disabilities in their neighborhood schools.

Ms. Lockwood spoke about ways to deal with various types of student behaviors, and the positive effect that parents, students, and staff, working together, can have on the school bus ride for special education students.

STS President Glenn Barry was on hand to answer questions and give an update on STS training opportunities and other upcoming events.

North Region Chair Cathy Kelly asked that anyone willing to volunteer or with ideas for future meetings contact one of the Northern Directors.



*Nancy Rosikiewicz, Mt. Olive Township Schools, Mike Ott, Wolfington, and Gerry Oram, North Hunterdon-Voorhees Regional High School District look a little windblown in this picture. Nancy and Gerry were the judges responsible for tallying the final scores.*

## Annual Election Will Take Place at June 3<sup>rd</sup> General Meeting

The STS Nominating Committee has put together its slate of candidates for the 2011 Board of Directors' elections. Elections will be held at the organization's semi-annual General Meeting on June 3<sup>rd</sup> at the Olde Country Club in Columbus, NJ. Official ballots were mailed to members in good standing. Members who are unable to attend the June 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting may complete and return the absentee ballot that was included in the mailing. This is the slate of candidates:

President	Glenn Barry
Secretary	Gretchen Biancone-Groff
Treasurer	Richard Costanza
Central Director	Al Olkowitz
Northern Director	Kathie Mac Donald
Central Director	Barbara Sargent
Southern Director	Sandra Hanson

## Danger Zone: What the Driver Must See

- 12 Feet out from the front bumper of the bus
- 6 feet out from the left rear dual wheel
- 12 feet out from the right dual wheel
- 200 feet out from the rear of the bus

*From 2010 Friday Focus: Sixty Tips in Sixty Minutes:*

Spot check your drivers, asking them for their driver's license and medical card. Make sure the documents they are carrying are current.

## Ruth Forman Participated in the First New Jersey Roadeo



When Ruth Forman competed in New Jersey's first Safety Competition in May of 1971, she probably couldn't imagine being the guest of honor at a Roadeo forty years in the future.

Ruth has chronicled her impressive career as a school bus driver in a scrapbook full of memorabilia. There are newspaper clippings, score sheets, patches (some pictured here) and certificates from the many Roadeos in which she competed, and beautiful cards and sentiments of appreciation from the students she drove.

She recalls the "big guys from the Supervisor's Association" who gave untold hours to the Roadeo and taught the Transportation Supervisor's courses, including Mel Thompson, Jim Holmes, Steve Lovet, Al Hicks, Sam Tornello, Andy Torey and Ernie Johnson. She took the Supervisor's courses and tried her hand at "being the boss," but decided it wasn't for her. She advanced her career by becoming the driver trainer for Manchester Township BOE, a position she held for twenty years.



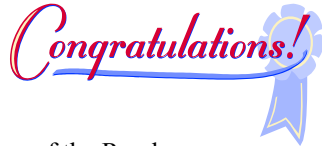
Ruth says that in the early days of the Roadeo, separate competitions were held in the North, Central, and South regions of the state. The drivers who placed first in the regional competitions competed against each other for a chance to go to the national competition.

For Ruth, who practiced daily, the challenge was more about making "that big yellow bus do what I wanted it to" than about winning the competition. But there's no denying she was a very skilled school bus driver. She could parallel park six inches from the curb without hitting the front and rear barriers and go forward and backwards in the serpentine of barrels without touching them. Her friend, Nancy Pugliese, said, "Ruth could stand a bus on two wheels."



Ruth retired from driving, but not school transportation, in 2007. For the last four years she has been donating her time working with the New Jersey School Bus Safety Committee as a way of saying "thank you" for all the memories past and present members have given her.

Ruth's favorite advice to her trainees was: "The safest mile is the mile behind you and the most dangerous mile is the mile ahead of you."



The winners of the Roadeo were announced at the end of the day at a Banquet and Awards Ceremony.

The driver with the overall highest score was Laurel Shauger of First Student's Layfayette, N.J. facility.

**Van**

- 1<sup>st</sup> place      *Lucy Van Dunk*  
Jordan Transportation
- 2<sup>nd</sup> place     *Mary Sue Albertson*  
Holcomb Bus Service
- 3rd place     *Lisa Polenz*  
Hunterdon Central Regional School District

**Conventional**

- 1st place     *Laurel Shauger*  
First Student
- 2nd place    *Joann Tange*  
Hunterdon Central Regional School District
- 3rd place    *Yesenia Maldonado*  
Student Transportation of America

**Transit**

- 1st place     *Ruth Foster*  
Rockaway Township BOE
- 2nd place    *Nicholas Giallanza*  
Central Regional, Bayville
- 3rd place    *Tina Richardson*  
Rockaway Township BOE

**TRAINING**

**Training Program Targets School Bullying**

The New Jersey State Bar Foundation, the educational arm of the New Jersey Bar Association, is offering free conflict resolution, teasing, and bullying training to school bus drivers and supervisors.

The course is very interactive, with trainees working together to brainstorm potential solutions to conflicts. Topics include how to differentiate between teasing and bullying, how to recognize passive and aggressive behavior, and ways to help the bullies and those being bullied.

A separate training date for school transportation personnel could be arranged based on interest.

The Foundation also has a variety of videos on conflict resolution and bullying available for borrowing. (A \$50.00 deposit will be held while a video is on loan.)

For more information, call Leisa-Anne Smith (732-937-7517) or go to <http://www.njsbf.org/educators-and-students/programs.html>.

**School Bus Driver Skills Need Updating and Refreshing**

Following is a list of possible topics for training sessions.

- ✓ District policies on school transportation
- ✓ Proper adjustment of mirrors and their correct use
- ✓ How to do a pre-trip and post-trip inspection (including checking for students left on bus)
- ✓ Defensive driving skills
- ✓ Legislative updates
- ✓ Procedures for loading and unloading passengers
- ✓ Procedures for entering and exiting school zones
- ✓ Student management

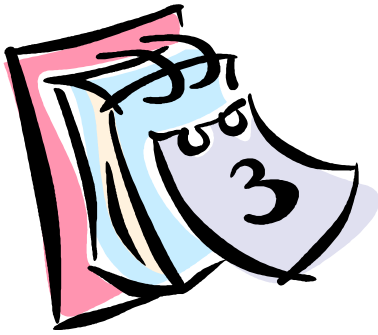
*If you have more ideas for training, please submit them to [info@njsts.org](mailto:info@njsts.org), attention: Stephanie*

**STS EXPRESS is the Newsletter of School Transportation Supervisors of New Jersey**

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## SAVE THE DATE



<b>Friday, June 3, 2011</b>	<b>General Meeting and Elections Old York Country Club Chesterfield, NJ</b>
<b>Friday, July 8, 2011</b>	<b>Friday Focus Holiday Inn Conference Center East Windsor, NJ</b>
<b>Saturday, July 9, 2011</b>	<b>Driver Trainer Refresher Course with Dick Fischer North Hunterdon-Voorhees Regional HS Participants must have taken 40 hour entry level driver trainer course with Dick Fischer</b>
<b>July 11-15, 2011</b>	<b>40 Hour Driver Trainer Course with Dick Fischer North Hunterdon-Voorhees Regional HS</b>

For additional information, please refer to the STS of NJ website, <http://njsts.org/>