

# Honor the Work



# Respect the Workers

## CATA driver sees the most of State College

by Peter Rambo

The man loves to drive, so what better job than driving a bus around State College?

Jim (who gave his first name only) is responsible for the safety of literally busloads of people at any point of any given day. He has driven for the Centre Area Transportation Authority (CATA) for five years.

CATA drivers need to have a Class B passenger license and airbrake certification, and to be over 21. A clean driving record and love for congested traffic don't hurt.

Jim said he drives his car much as he drives his bus. "I sometimes catch myself stopping at railroads," he said, laughing.

Why bus driving?

"It's fun and educational," he answers wryly. But Jim admits that he just "likes driving." CATA is also a good employer. Drivers get typical benefits like health insurance that includes dental and vision coverage, and they have a 401(k) retirement plan. Jim said overtime is available but he doesn't take it often. The pay is "pretty good" without it, he said. CATA bus drivers are represented by the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, the country's largest union of public employees.

Jim uses this job to support himself and his growing family. He said he's in the process of getting married, and he has a two-year-old daughter. He spends a lot of his time off fishing, but he hasn't caught anything recently. "I'm content to sit back and watch my daughter," he said. She has had more luck than he has had lately. At only two, she has already caught some blue

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gill and a few trout.

Jim sees his job as "providing a service" to State College residents, an essential one for which he sometimes doesn't get the respect he deserves. During the summer, students and his employer are "laid back," but when the fall semester starts up, things will change, he said. Supervisors get strict about making it to stops on time, and the students become more demanding. Football weekends and Thursday through Saturday nights are the worst, he said. The combination of alcohol and school spirit leads to unsecured air space.

"Anything and everything will be thrown in the bus...especially if we win," he said. This year Jim played it smart and decided not to work Fridays. But troublemakers don't make up the majority of bus passengers, he said.

Jim works a variety of shifts and a variety of routes.

"If I worked the same route every day, by Wednesday I'd be bored to death." About half of his routes are Penn State's Loop and Link routes, and the other half are longer routes to residential and commercial areas. Despite the variety, Jim still gets a few regular riders. Most passengers are deferential and quiet, and Jim is happy to take them where they need to go or answer their questions.

Jim laughs when asked if he has any pet peeves about the riders of State College. "Do you want a headache?" His biggest

peeve is when people walk in front of the bus. He then points to a sign above the entrance to the front of the bus that reads: "Please do not walk in front of the bus."

Passengers are supposed to enter at the front and exit at the back. In practice, most drivers won't allow you to enter through the back, but few object if you exit through the front. He is especially concerned about oblivious people crossing in front. When someone runs in front of Jim, he has to hit the brakes, putting "the people in the back into the front."

A CATA driver is expected to know every route, but sometimes can be out of practice.

"It's OK, though," he said, smiling. "If you don't know one of [the routes], they give you a cheat sheet."



Photo by Peter Rambo

Jim has been driving for the Centre Area Transportation Authority for five years. He said the job helps support his growing family.

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