

Bus Rodeo Champion Remains Humble Amid Record Wins



Written by Jeanette Reveles



Larry Hannon of Warminster, Pa., might just be the best school bus driver ever. He is the winner of a record eight National School Transportation Association (NSTA) International Safety Competitions, or “rodeos.”

This is a major achievement as no other school bus driver in history has won first place so many times at the national level. The rodeos are made up of a written test, which covers laws and procedures, as well as a driving portion made up of a pre-trip bus inspection as well as driving and parking maneuvers.

Hannon has been a school bus driver for Centennial School District for the last 38 years.

“I got my (commercial) license at 18 and I’ve held on to it ever since,” he told STN. “I originally got the job because I could be a substitute driver and work it in with going to college, with different class times and all. Then when I got out of college and started working, I was able to juggle it so that I could still drive in the mornings, and I continued to do that.”

So what has made him stick around for nearly four decades? “I just like to drive the buses and it’s fun with the kids and all,” he said.

Hannon added that his favorite part of the job is “trying to get a good rapport with the students on the bus, trying to be a positive influence on them ... That’s the neatest part of it, the kids on the bus.”

In addition to having participated in the NSTA competition 30 times, Hannon has also taken part in 36 Pennsylvania state competitions and won 11 of these. He has also competed in 37 local competitions, winning about 20.

He shared that he will be participating again this year at the NSTA competition from July 19 to 20 in Charleston, S.C.

“The pressure is on to try to do well. I’m nervous,” he admitted.

But he shared he is also excited to reunite with old friends: “It’s really neat how you make friends at these things and you meet them once a year.”

Lori Meyer, transportation supervisor at Centennial School District, said that she is “not at all surprised” that Hannon has been so successful at safety competitions and she can recall seeing him drive the first time.

“Right before I started here, I decided to just go up to the rodeo. None of the drivers knew me and I didn’t really want to make my presence known, but I wanted to see what was going on. I got to watch him firsthand the very first time I met him.

“I was incredibly impressed, because as I stood there looking at everything — and I’ve driven a bus before — I thought, ‘I don’t think I’d be able to do that.’ His skill set is just top-notch. He did every single thing just about flawlessly, and it didn’t seem like it took that much for him to do it.”

Not Necessarily in It to Win It

Hannon said he first decided to get involved in safety competitions because his fellow school bus drivers mentioned it to him and it sounded like fun.

"Some of the other drivers were talking about it and it seemed like a cool thing to do. I was a young male, liked to drive anything with wheels on it. I figured I would give it a shot," he recalled.

He said that when he first started competing, he never imagined he would one day break records.

"I had no idea about that. I didn't even think of that. We just did it for the fun. We just went over one day and drove through the course. It was all in fun. It's still in fun," he admitted.

However, he is proud of his accomplishments: "I think it's neat. I do look at my record and figure someone is going to have to try real hard and long to beat the record. But it's like a feather in my hat, that's all."

Hannon stressed that his main goal when competing in rodeos is not winning but becoming a better, safer driver.

"The whole thing of the safety competitions is that it makes a better driver out of you — just doing those events, the maneuverability of the bus, and the back-up situations that you get into, and even studying all the laws. I know the laws from studying them over and over. I can tell exactly by looking if I can go somewhere with the bus or I can't, and most of it is from doing these rodeos. It's supposed to make a better driver out of everyone, and I think that's very important."

According to Meyer, Hannon does not let the success get to his head.

"He's pretty humble about his abilities and what he's accomplished as a school bus driver. He's a fantastic example and all-around good guy,"

Hannon is not sure what to say about the fact that many in the industry consider him the best school bus driver out there. "If someone were to say that, I would say no," he said. "There are always people that can do better. I am sure."

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