



Photos by Ken Shmidheiser

Chuck Abrams, at left, and Keith Black work on a hydraulic pump in one of Pulaski County's 133 school buses. The technicians are equipped to handle any problem.

# READY to ROLL

Each school day, 8,400 Pulaski County students are transported 7,000 miles by bus. This is the story of the team that keeps them safe and on schedule.



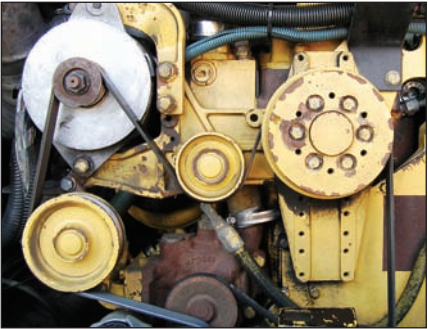
By **KEN SHMIDHEISER**  
Managing Editor

What gets six miles a gallon, travels over a million miles a year and costs \$3.7 million to drive?

If you answered 133 Pulaski County school buses, you go to the head of the class.

Shuttling 8,400 county students to and from their respective schools is, to quote Pulaski County School Supt. Steve Butcher, "an awesome job."

That job includes coordinating the 140 county school bus drivers who handle 116 routes. Each driver must possess a Commercial Drivers License



(CDL) with a passenger endorsement and have completed 44 hours of specialized training.

Pulaski County school buses service eight elementaries, two middle and three high schools.

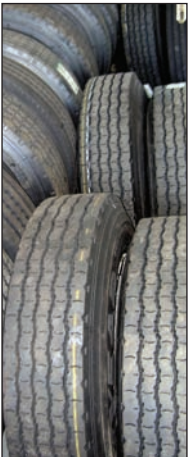
"We are also in our fourth year of handling student transportation for the Area Technology School," noted Sherry Super, a spokesperson

for the county school district. Don't let outward appearances fool you. Today's school bus—with the possible exception of still

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A console of switches on a school bus looks like mission control. The district goes through 300 tires a year. Steve Woods, at left, is fleet maintenance supervisor for the Pulaski County School District. Like all on his team, he is both a skilled technician and certified bus driver... as well as being a nice guy.







# School Buses

Continued from **FRONT**

being yellow—is a far cry from the bus that hauled baby boomers to class in the 1960s. Equipped with up to five computers, GPS, a dizzying array of safety devices, a “blackbox,” and dual onboard digital cameras to allow a driver to monitor the well-being of his or her young charges, a 2010 school bus is a marvel of modern technology. But that technology comes at a cost: An average school bus costs the district \$77,000, according to Wayne Bennett, transportation director.

“The two pillars of a successful transportation organization are safe drivers and safe buses,” Bennett explained. “A comprehensive, safety directed driver training program produces safe drivers. Thorough and timely vehicle inspections and maintenance results in safe buses.”

The latter functions—inspection and maintenance—are the job of Steve Woods, fleet supervisor.

And it’s a big job. “Every bus gets a 40-step inspection once a month to insure that it meets local, state and federal regulations,” Woods explained. “State law dictates the kind of equipment we have, and the inspection process.”

To keep the buses rolling, Woods and his team of four mechanic/technicians, possess skills in several disciplines ranging from simple mechanics to advanced electronics and computer science. And all the personnel are, themselves, certified school bus drivers. Team



members include Keith Black, Bobby Woodall, Chuck Abrams and Sam Kelly.

“Over the years we have seen mechanical devices such as vacuum controls replaced by computers, sensors and electronic modules,” Woods noted.

Work performed at the county bus garage may be as mundane as changing the 300-plus tires the buses wear out in the course of a year, to assuring the safety of anti-lock break systems. In a given day fleet personnel may be called to work on Cummins, Monarch, Allison, Caterpillar, International, Thomas and a variety of other brand equipment.

“We do everything but warranty work in-house—engines, brakes, transmissions, you name it,” Woods said.

Interestingly, the six-miles-per-gallon fuel mileage of an average 66-passenger diesel-powered school bus has not changed all that much over the years.

“But there is a big difference in the amount of pollution,” Woods noted. “Modern buses have much cleaner exhaust and create less pollution. But they also have much more complicated systems.”



Photos by Ken Shmidheiser  
Members of the Pulaski County School District Fleet Maintenance team include, front row from left, Sam Kelly and Steve Woods, supervisor; and back row, Keith Black, Bobby Woodall and Chuck Abrams.

## ... the rest of the story.



### SOMERSET INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

- 11 buses
- Transportation Budget: \$437,037.57
- Miles driven per year: 55,000

“School buses and school bus drivers play an extremely important role in protecting our children as they travel to and from school and school events. The National Safety Council has stated that travel by school bus is the safest mode of transportation on the road. I am happy that we employ some of the best school bus drivers in this part of the state of Kentucky.”

Transportation Director Noel Hargis



### SCIENCE HILL INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

- 8 buses
- Transportation Budget: \$131,262
- Miles driven per year: 26,000

“Our bus drivers have the most important position in our district. Children's lives are literally at stake twice per day and we only hire and keep extremely competent and serious adults in these critical positions. Even if we invest the time and money in training someone, if they give us the least bit of concern behind the wheel, we cut them loose,”

Science Hill Supt. Rick Walker

Nevertheless, fuel costs the district \$562,337.78 a year.

Another improvement that has evolved is driver comfort.

“Our newer buses have adjustable pedals and air ride seats, and since 2007 every bus has dual onboard cameras. Even though it would have been nice this hot summer, air conditioning at \$10,000 per bus is still out of the budget,” Woods said.

“Everything in our buses is designed for safety. Buses have onboard GPS trackers and black boxes that can return valuable data. Our job is to carefully document the maintenance of all

133 buses, and to keep everything working for the safety of our students and drivers,” Woods said.

Speaking of the behind-the-scene role Woods and his crew play in the daily safe transportation of 8,400 students, Supt. Butcher made this observation:

“Pulaski County is the third largest county in Kentucky which translates into over 7,000 miles a day traveled by school buses! Our entire transportation department does an awesome job at keeping our buses in top shape and keeping our children safe.”