

People

Sights, sounds, folks of mass transit

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The world of mass transit travel is a world within a world for people who regularly move to and from work (and play) along the mass transit lines. And for just 50 cents, the price of general fare on local buses, you can experience the wonderful world of mass transit.

The Winston-Salem Transit Authority has done several in-house studies which indicate who ride the buses and why.

But the sheer numbers give no real insight into the daily routines of busriding. The numbers, although helpful, ignore the stresses of the bus drivers, the pet peeves of riders and drivers, the conversations and colorful personalities prevalent along the city's bus routes.

Along the way to your destination, you're likely to catch snatches of conversations rivaling gossip columnists and psychologists' offices alike. Recently, on one southside-bound bus, two passengers casually and openly discussed the details of a mutual acquaintance's marital problems.

"I kept telling her that he wasn't about nothing," said the first. "I told her and told her but she didn't want to listen."

"I know what you mean," said the second. "Now, she knows. He's been out doing all these things and she didn't want to listen to anybody but everybody knew he was messing around on her."

Seemingly satisfied that they had accurately assessed their friend's situation from the very start, the two would-be marriage counselors turned their conversation back to the scorching summer temperatures.

Some bus passengers seem to relish their bus rides, if only for the opportunity for celebrity it can bring. Although not always well-known themselves, there are passengers who always seem to be acquainted with someone who, for better or worse, has made a name for themselves. A southeast-bound passenger, who had remained relatively quiet on her journey, announced to the bus driver and anyone else that would listen, that she was the next-door neighbor of a woman accused of shooting her boyfriend. That revelation immediately made her the most popular person on the bus as the other passengers ceased their conversations and tuned into her description of the culprit and the victim.

"I used to see them all the time. But yeah, she's the one that shot him and they lived right across the street from me. She's in court right now," she boasted. Instant celebrity was hers. She knew someone that was on trial for murder. On a north-bound bus, there was a man who claimed to be the father of an infant child shot by a stray bullet. Encouraged by the "oohs" and "aahs" of passengers on the bus, the gentleman told and retold his story, each time adding a small, but increasingly gruesome, detail and vowing that "if it's the last thing I do, somebody's going to pay." Although the incident had occurred some months earlier and apparently already been resolved in court, his story was granted an attentive audience for several bus stops.

In addition to the gossips and the celebrity-seekers on the buses is an assortment of other personality types and characters that seem to be particularly peculiar to the mass transit circuit. There are those who have an "expert" opinion about everything from the A-bomb to zodiac signs. There are passengers who talk to themselves and their imaginary companions. Those eccentric passengers, apparently regular bus riders, go almost unnoticed by almost everyone, except those new to bus riding (and intrigued newspaper reporters). One woman who is well-known on her bus route carried on a conversation with an invisible fellow rider from the time she boarded the bus until she got off at the bus center downtown.

"I'm going downtown to take care of things," she said, glancing and gesturing to the "passenger." "They're always telling me to do this. I'm just not going to listen. I don't have to. You know what I mean? I'm going downtown to do some things." Even more fascinating than the woman's one-person conversation was the fact that no one paid her any attention, as if a such an incident were a normal occurrence.

In the midst of this microcosm of the larger community, the dedicated bus driver wheels on to his destination. Bus drivers come in all shapes, sizes, genders and personality types. Some carry on conversations with passengers, others strictly adhere to "Rule #8," posted in plain view and stipulating that because the "Operator must devote his full attention to safely operating the vehicle," ...passengers should refrain from "engaging in excessive conversation with the operator."

But some extremely personable drivers manage to greet each passenger with a broad smile and a pleasant "How ya' doing today?" Those type drivers, appear to be more the rule than the exception on the local routes, although there are some who prefer to keep distance between themselves and their passengers. And drivers do have pet peeves.

"You have got to have your fare ready when I get to the stop," one driver reprimanded. "You know I'm coming and then you wait 'til I get



photos by Mike Or

Travelling the 21 city bus routes often can reveal a whole new world of people, ideas and conversations. An estimated 3.2 million residents travel on Winston-Salem Transit Authority buses each year.

there to get your money out. That makes me late, then I'm late getting all these people to work and wherever they've got to go. It also makes me have to rush our older passengers who need more time. So you younger people need to help me out. Be ready when you know I'm coming."

And indeed, "Rule #1" clearly asks passengers to "Please have exact fare or fare card ready when bus arrives."

Some sympathetic drivers will wait a second or two for passengers. But a passenger on one route, with a child tucked under one arm, bags tucked under the other and just yards away from a bus stop sign, was seen frantically chasing one of the big blue and white vehicles to no avail. One driver matter-of-factly stated after leaving an elderly woman standing at the corner, only a few feet from an official bus stop. "That ain't no bus stop. She don't see no sign right there. Waving don't mean nothing cos' it ain't a bus stop on the corner where she is."

On the other hand, a driver on a Saturday route from Northside Shopping Center compassionately stopped well past an official bus stop to allow a mother and her children to catch up to the bus. Arthur Kenner, assistant manager of the transit authority, said his firm is in the process of adding more bus stop signs along the routes, but that technically any intersection is considered a bus stop regardless of whether there is a bus stop sign in place.

Some casual friendships are formed between passengers who ride the same routes at the same time each day. Some don't know each other's names, but they nonetheless share seats and engage in general conversations about one another's children, grandchildren and jobs. The route that travels through some of the integrated neighborhoods on the south side of town provide some particularly interesting insights. There are sets of elderly Afro-American and white passengers, daily bus riders, who years ago could not even ride the same bus together, much less share a seat. But, bound by the rigors of their bus travel and "golden years," they have found common ground. Unfazed by any historical significance of their association or the irony of it, they share war stories, home remedies for various aches and pains and news of family births.

And contrary to popular belief, it is not just the poor or downtrodden who ride public buses. Everyone rides the bus. During the busiest parts of the day, you are apt to see bank and corporate employees waiting their turn to board buses alongside laborers and students. Reasons other than poverty prompt many to travel on the buses. There are youngsters new to the workforce, saving money to buy their first car, and corporate workers who opt to pay the nominal bus fare and avoid the high fees charged for daily and monthly downtown parking.

"I have a car and my husband has a car but I just don't like driving in the traffic everyday," said one passenger headed downtown to her job. "I'd just as soon take the bus. I don't have to be worried about driving in the snow and all the bad weather and I don't have to spend time hunting for a parking space and I certainly don't want to pay \$100 a month just to park near my job."

"I should have enough money soon to buy me a car," commented a nurse's assistant traveling one of the west side routes. "I've been able to

save money riding the bus and I was able to get an apartment. I'm better able to afford a car and I don't have a problem riding the bus. I've had times I have time to study while I'm riding back and forth and I don't have that if I were driving."

The transit authority services approximately 270,000 passengers a month on the 21 routes that run across the city. It is possible to reach any destination within the city limits by carefully selecting routes.

The addition of several new services also has expanded both the number and variety of residents riding city buses. The addition of night buses has made it more convenient for persons working night shifts. At work to get to and from work. Kenner said that the night service is very successful and that the authority hopes to be able to add more



The paths of a broad range of city residents cross on the bus routes

the two that now must cover the entire south and north sides in order to make trips to the mall.

The new kids on the block in city transit are the two trolley routes. One of the trolleys follows a route that ends at Old Salem; the other follows the West End side of town. Kenner said response to the trolleys is very good. Fare on the trolley, which also acts as a type of convenience for downtown employees, is 25 cents.

"We're pretty pleased with the response we've gotten to the trolleys," said Kenner, who added that the trolleys are not purely for aesthetics. "On Sept. 6, we're going to start Saturday service on the Old Salem trolley. There's some indication that we may even be increasing the number of visitors to Old Salem by providing the trolley service."

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

FRIDAY, SEPT. 2

The band Spex will present a jazz fusion concert at the Outta the Bag series at Winston Square Park from noon to 1 p.m.

SATURDAY, SEPT. 3

The Lincoln Heights School Reunion will be held in Wilkesboro at the Old School Park. For more information call 667-7805.

TUESDAY, SEPT. 6

The Winston-Salem Symphony Choral will hold its annual fall tryouts Sept. 6 and Sept. 12 at 7:30 p.m. at Hanes Community Center. To schedule a tryout, call the symphony office at 725-1035 or come by 610 Coliseum Drive. Come prepared to sing a song of your choice. Sight reading is not required.

The Blues Talent Contestant will present a blues concert during the Outta the Bag series at Winston Square Park from noon to 1 p.m.

THURSDAY, SEPT. 8

District Three of the North Carolina Nurses Association will meet at 7 p.m. at the F.L. Atkins Building at Winston-Salem State University. Dr. Bert Bennett, psychologist, will present the program, "Stress Management - How to Think and Laugh Your Way Out of Stress." All registered nurses are invited to attend.

SOCIAL NOTES

'Parenting Today' session set by AKA chapter, NAACP

Phi Omega Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc. and the local NAACP Learning Centers will co-sponsor "Parenting Today: Issues and Answers, a seminar for parents with an emphasis on education and the black family Saturday, Sept. 17, at 1 p.m. in the Communications Building at Winston-Salem State University.

The seminar, featuring panelists and question/answer sessions, is open to the public at no charge.

Topics and presenters will include: "Education and the Black Family" by Palmer Friende, a retired administrator from the local school system; "Preparing Students for the

SAT" by Dr. Leroy Fails, regional director of the College Board in Atlanta; "Interpersonal Relationships Between Parents and Children" by Dr. Myrna B. Williams, a local psychologist; "Drug Awareness" by a prevention specialist for STEP ONE, The Center for Drug Abuse; and "You and Your School Board" by Buford Bailey, a member of

the local school board. Door prizes will be given to the winners of the WSSU vs. Stone College football game that evening. Annette Wilson, chair of the Phi Omega chapter, and Walter Marshall, president of the Winston-Salem Chapter of the NAACP, Bessie A. program coordinator.

Nursing sorority awards \$1,000 scholarship to Monica Crews

Monica Crews of Winston-Salem State University recently was awarded a \$1,000 scholarship by Chi Eta Phi Nursing Sorority Inc. The scholarship award was presented Saturday, Aug. 27, by the local chapter, Chi Chi, during their annual picnic and program.

Mrs. Crews, a native of Milton, is a senior nursing student and is

president of the Association of Student Nurses.

She was one of 15 students selected nationally by the sorority in the awarding of more than \$20,000 in scholarships. The scholarship award is named for founder Aliene Carrington Ewell who, along with 11 other nurses, organized the sorority in 1932. Scholar-

ship recipients are selected on the basis of scholastic ability, interest in nursing, leadership ability and other qualities.

The picnic and program were held at Reynolds Park. Attending the picnic were family and friends of Mrs. Crews. Members of the WSSU nursing school also were in attendance. They included Sadie

Webster, director, and Mrs. Jeffries. Chapter members came out for the event. Local Chi chapter officers are: Jo Wilks, basileus; Elletson Lough, anti-basileus; Phyllis grammetus; Velma Field toleus; Annie Allen, tamiochus; Mildred Smith, Virginia Thombs, dean of nursing; and Ann Moore, historian.