

Transit buses see shiny upgrades

BY MICHAEL TODD
STAFF WRITER

A remanufactured Chapel Hill Transit bus spun aluminum rims and gold-colored lug nuts Friday during its maiden voyage.

"We'll have a little bling on our buses," said Kurt Neufang, interim director of Chapel Hill Transit.

Seven 1990 RTS buses, which are the oldest in the town's fleet, are being remanufactured now, and 13 buses in total will be updated.

Neufang said that each completed bus is expected to arrive from Riverside, Calif., in 10-to-14 day intervals.

The restoration for each vehicle costs \$196,000 and takes about 40 days to complete. Technicians dismantle the entire vehicle except for the chassis, according to a press release issued by the town of Chapel Hill.

Remanufacturing can almost double a bus's lifespan.

Neufang said the buses were well-built and are worth saving.

"They exceed the normal life expectancy for a normal transit vehicle," he said, adding that 12 to 13 years is a normal lifespan for such a vehicle.

Each refurbished bus will get a new engine, drive train and a new or rebuilt suspension. Technicians also will add a new bike rack and wheelchair lift on each bus.

Macy Neshati, vice president of sales and marketing for Complete Coach Works, said remanufacturing an older bus is cheaper and more environmentally sound than purchasing a new bus.

"It's effectively a new bus for half the money," Neshati said. "We are trying to keep quality vehicles out on the streets instead of letting them pile up in a junkyard."



Sophomore Megan Fox and junior Jared Ostendorf, the first two riders on the renovated NU bus, are greeted with balloons and confetti Friday.

The company replaces an oil-burning two-stroke engine with a four-stroke version that Neshati said conserves 50-to-70 percent more fuel.

Scott Blacknell, a town bus driver for about 16 years who drove the first refurbished bus, said he preferred his usual vehicle.

"It just doesn't have the power the other bus had," Blacknell said, noting that the bus slowed to 18 mph as it climbed a hill on Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard.

Blacknell was also unimpressed with the refurbished model's ride and steering.

But Blacknell said some of the features, such as the electronically-controlled mirrors on the new bus were an improvement.

Technicians replaced nearly everything except the stainless-steel chassis, which Neufang says are irreplaceable.

"The life expectancy of a normal transit vehicle is about 10 to 12 years, and these buses have lasted much longer than that," Neufang said.

Catherine Lazorko, the town's information officer, said the project is a preventative measure.

"This was an innovative way for Chapel Hill Transit to keep its fleet strong," she said.

Lazorko said high demands for public transportation in the area forced some creative thinking from town officials.

Chapel Hill Transit has a fleet of 86 buses that carry about 5 million passengers each year.

"Our fleet is so well-used, they wouldn't send all 13 buses to be refurbished at the same time," Lazorko said.

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MORGAN CREEK

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two issues would be tied together by the impact of Carolina North.

Ed Harrison, an incumbent council member, emphasized the perspective he brings to various issues as an environmental planner.

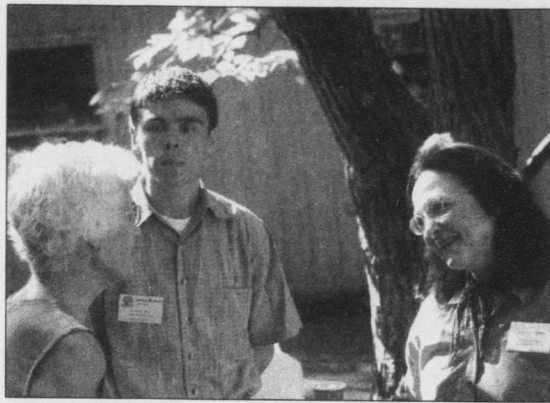
Mark Kleinschmidt, an incumbent candidate, emphasized the unique nature of Chapel Hill's solutions to a variety of problems.

He also said that downtown is on the verge of a "renaissance."

Will Raymond, a challenger, advocated the establishment of a new, more professional relationship with University officials, whose plans for Carolina North he has criticized.

Bill Thorpe, a former council member running for office, did not take a stab at development or Carolina North, but told the residents that he was able to get things done on Town Council.

Residents said they enjoyed the forum so much they might have



Council candidates Jason Baker and Robin Cutson discuss town issues with resident Pat Brooks before the forum at Morgan Creek on Saturday.

another, with or without politics. David Morgan, who opened his yard to the gathering, said that the event was a memorable occasion.

"I think it went great, it's a beautiful day, beautiful Carolina

blue sky, nice candidates who were able to concisely give us (answers)," he said.

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PLEDGE

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But Muller said the bill, which is being reviewed in the Senate judiciary committee, might draw its true worth from the discussion that follows.

"It may be that the value of the proposal is not that it would get passed but that it would be debated," he said.

"Legislators are trying to impress upon the judges how serious they are."

Muller also said the other pieces of legislation most likely were intended to influence the opinions of future judges.

"They're people," Muller said. "It would be human nature for people to be at least a little bit aware and

potentially swayed by criticism."

Experts predict the case will take the traditional route of appeals and arrive on the desks of the justices of the U.S. Supreme Court, bypassing any legislation regarding jurisdiction.

"I expect the Supreme Court will hear this case in the next couple years," said Michael Gerhardt, a professor in the UNC School of Law.

"It is a possibility that the federal appeals court overturns the ruling, and it will end there."

Louisiana Sen. Mary Landrieu's concerns about the ruling extend past the pledge to other references to God in American life. Landrieu, a Democrat, introduced a resolution to protect the phrase "In God we trust" on coins and bills.

But experts say they do not expect the fate of those phrases to rest on the fate of the pledge.

"I don't think the two are related at all," Gerhardt said.

"They go back to different periods in our history. The pledge is different in that the pledge is something that is required to be said in schools."

And the question likely will linger on until the final word is given from the nation's highest court, he said.

"I do think that if the Supreme Court issues a ruling on the constitutionality of the pledge as it is written, (then) that will likely stand the test of time."

Contact the State & National Editor at stntdesk@unc.edu.

JORDAN

FROM PAGE 3

happening in America.

Despite a general animosity toward U.S. foreign policy in the region throughout the last half century, my Jordanian friends treated me as one of their own.

In fact, this kindness even manifested itself recently when a Jordanian friend e-mailed the group regarding his concern about the "tornado" hitting North Carolina he saw on the news — Hurricane Ophelia.

Perceived American injustices in the region were also treated with humor.

As some other UNC students and I prepared to play soccer with our Palestinian friends, one jokingly suggested that the UNC team should be called the "Bulldozers," in reference to the United States' support of Israel and its policy of demolishing the homes of alleged Palestinian terrorists.

These experiences humanized the people that are often demonized in the U.S. media.

Arabs aren't people who train for jihad on monkey bars all day. Arabs aren't people who burn U.S. flags

constantly. And they're certainly not people who should be humiliated simply because of their skin color.

I didn't need to go halfway around the world to learn that, but after living in the Middle East for six weeks, that concept takes on new meaning.

My time in Jordan was also a lesson in ethnocentrism, the arrogant refusal to consider other cultures within their own unique contexts.

As Americans, our group tended to question the Jordanian monarchy in relation to our representative government, Arab women's rights in relation to American women's rights, and, for some, Jordanian toilet models versus American ones.

These comparisons impressed upon me the complexities of the Middle East and, indeed, the world. There are no one-size-fits-all panaceas for the world's problems nor are there an infinite number of solutions.

Somewhere in the ambiguous

gray area between absolutism and relativism — where an Islamic minaret and McDonald's arches share the skyline — lies the complex value judgments we make everyday.

The amalgamation of these concepts and the idiosyncrasies of Jordanian culture taught me more than any course at UNC ever could have.

So that's why I have trouble summing up my experience in one word.

And for all you people out there looking for one-word answers, I can only offer you a one-word suggestion: travel.

Contact Sam Dolbee at dolbee@email.unc.edu.

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