

From Buses to Baselines

Grandmother goes from lunchroom aide to director of support services in seven years.

By MAUREEN HREHOCIK, Associate Editor

From housewife to director of transportation, grounds, maintenance and warehouses for the largest school district in Wayne County, Michigan, in seven years. For N. Faye Bird, that transformation has been an ongoing learning experience.

Bird is Director of Support

Services for the Woodhaven School District in Woodhaven, MI, a 22-square-mile city/township south of Detroit. Like many others, shortage of staff, equipment and finances are the largest problems that confront the 52-year-old grandmother of three. She has been forced to cut down fertilizing

and mowing and to forego name brand chemicals and fertilizers for less expensive types.

"My philosophy thus far has been to keep things neat, clean and presentable," says Bird. "If we had the finances, we would like to have everything landscaped. We could have beautifully-manicured grounds."

Besides overseeing a 25-bus fleet with 18 regular drivers, custodians, grounds maintenance staff, warehouses, 11 school buildings and a host of other duties pertaining to running a school district, it is also Bird's responsibility to administer 500 acres in grounds and prepare football and soccer fields and tennis courts for play during the school season.

"We have an eight-day mowing calendar for most of our turf," she said, "however, we do maintain our baseball fields on a daily basis. We fertilize three times a year with a 12/12/12 mixture and use a 20/10/4 mixture for greenup purposes. I'm a tightwad, so we don't use one product brand all the time. When I find something that works and the price is right, I use it." The athletic field overseeding mixture used is 45 percent K-31 tall fescue, 20 percent perennial rye, 20 percent Kentucky bluegrass and 15 percent creeping red fescue.

The school district leases 150 acres to local farmers who plant mainly corn and soybeans. Bird's responsibilities include seeing that the acreage is kept tidy. Thirty of the 500 acres stand idle.

Bird's budget to accomplish all this is \$150,000.

Of her 68-member staff, four are full-time grounds maintenance workers. The school district's one

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Work on the district's athletic fields is one of the most time-consuming tasks.



N. Faye Bird, director of support services for the Woodhaven (MI) School District works on a \$150,000 budget. Students help with work in the summer.

football field is seeded, not sod. Baseball fields have been renovated.

Bird rents aerators, fertilizer spreaders, grasscatchers and electric rakes. The district owns three tractors, one pick up truck and two buses which have been overhauled to use as maintenance vehicles.

"I encourage districts to use buses for utility vehicles," Bird said. "We've taken all the seats out and can store and haul whatever we need to the location we're working on. You can't buy a truck for \$1,200 these days."

Bird has lived in Woodhaven School District for 35 years. She admits it's been hard being a woman to gain acceptance in her position. In 1969, she volunteered to be a lunch aid and the following day became a school bus driver. In 1975 she was named transportation supervisor. In 1976, she was named director of support services.

"Most people out there don't be-

lieve a woman can do this job," she says. "I make mistakes like everyone else. I'm not a political person. If it's best for the district, I'm going to do it. I've found this is the way to earn respect."

Bird says she's going to school "to learn what I already know." She attends Wayne County Community College two nights a week working toward her Associates Degree in business administration. She is on the Dean's List.

Bird says her background as a homemaker and growing up on a 10-acre farm has given her the background to be able to fix and do things for herself, using common sense and experience. She has, however, conceded some operations to technology.

It is Bird's hope that some day her budget will match her future plans for Woodhaven, making it one of the most eye-pleasing and landscape-efficient districts in Michigan.

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