

End of road in sight for Lincoln bus driver

By Gerry Beltz
Staff Reporter

It's almost the last stop for StarTran bus driver Jim Graves.

Graves, 62, will be retiring in about a month after 15 1/2 years of working for StarTran. For the last six years, he has driven UNL students between east and city campuses.



Graves runs the Bryan Hospital bus — route five — on weekday mornings, then switches to the University Place — route four — in the afternoons.

He also runs the Fairgrounds shuttle bus on home football Saturdays, a route for which Graves said he had a special fondness.

"I get to see a lot of people from out-of-town that I only get to see once a year," he said. "Plus, we (StarTran shuttle drivers) get a free ticket to get into the game."

Graves said the driving wasn't what he would miss most.

"I'll miss my passengers more than the driving," he said. "I've made a lot of friends over these years, both young and old."

Graves said his riders had kept him happy throughout his time with StarTran.

"I enjoy this. My passengers make my day."

Although he always seems to be in a good mood, Graves said, he had no secret for happiness.



Damon Lee/DN

StarTran bus driver Jim Graves chats with passengers on his University Place bus route Monday afternoon. Graves, who plans to retire later this year, said he enjoyed his job and the people he has met during his 15 years as a Lincoln bus driver.

"I love people," he said. "People are so unique."

Graves said the route between city and east campuses was one of his favorites.

"I like this route. I've been on this route longer than I have on any route in the city."

"There's good people out here.

There's good people on all the routes, but this one has lots of straightaways (long, straight distances) on it, and it's an easy running route."

When boarding a bus driven by Graves, riders get not just a "Hello," but a hearty "How are you?" Sometimes they get a handshake or pat on the back; other times a request of

"Gimme a smile."

Some of Graves' regular passengers bring cans of pop for their favorite driver. They share a smile and a laugh with Graves when boarding or getting off the bus.

Graves said he shared a good rapport with all his passengers, especially the riders headed for the univer-

sity. "I get along really well with my college students and my public school students," he said. "I guess it's the communication I've got between them and I."

With more than 15 years invested in his job, Graves said he had watched some passengers grow up.

"Some of them, I'll catch them in junior high. Now they've got families and moved away, and they come back and still remember me."

"It's neat. It's really neat."

The recent partnership between UNL Transportation Services and StarTran provides free rides for all UNL students, staff and faculty. It has caused an overall increase in the number of StarTran riders, and according to StarTran reports, has made the University Place route the second busiest in the city.

Graves said he thought the alliance between the university and StarTran was mutually beneficial.

"It's a really good deal for college students, plus it builds ridership for StarTran."

When Graves isn't handling a bus, he still likes to drive — his motorcycle.

"A bunch of us will ride up to Seward or Greenwood for coffee. Sometimes we'll make a run as far as Nebraska City for lunch or dinner or something like that."

But Graves said he had at least one activity planned for his retirement that is unrelated to driving.

"I'm gonna get into fishing."

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