

Diane & Mike Welch

On the morning of Sept. 11, 2001, Mike and Diane Welch took the written test to earn their Commercial Driver's Licenses. "As we took the exam, TV monitors blared overhead just after the Twin Towers fell. We passed the exam. We figured if we could pass the test with that distraction, we could probably drive a bus safely with unruly kids behind us," Mike recalled.

In the 18 years since, the two have driven thousands of miles, safely transporting Tahoma students. They had zero accidents, zero injuries, zero damage to equipment, zero tickets and zero days called in sick.

What they did rack up -- in addition to miles -- was countless relationships with Tahoma students and families, and their fellow staff members. Their contributions helped many students become Future Ready. Before joining the Transportation team, both Mike and Diane retired from their previous jobs with a pharmaceutical company, where Mike had worked for 26 years and Diane for 17 years.

"We wanted to stay local, have no more long commutes or constant air travel, and have more time to ourselves," Mike said. Diane drove by Central Services and saw a school bus with a banner that said "Hiring Drivers -- We Will Train You."

"We trained together, tested together, and started at the same time (except for a coin toss to determine seniority)," he added. Before the pharmaceutical company, Diane worked at a bank, a bakery, and sold fabric and sewing machines. Mike flew airplanes for seven years, selling them and ferrying new aircraft from the factory to the buyer. While at Tahoma, both Diane and Mike served on the PSE board and Diane designed and quilted two banners; one for PSE Tahoma and one as a retirement gift from PSE to Mike Maryanski. Both served on multiple Transportation Department committees. They also worked in Tahoma Learning Community programs; as monitors for evening basketball and Mike teaching night school digital photography classes.

Fellow bus driver Alan Eades said, "I don't know if I've ever met someone quite like Mike -- and I mean that in the most positive and respectful way. He exudes positivity, optimism and a cheerful attitude that spills over into others on a daily basis. I don't know if I've ever seen him in a bad mood."

Transportation Director Tom Misfeldt said that "Mike has a pure heart when it comes to making sure that his students received every opportunity to succeed, whether it was during their school years or beyond. He is the one person that had a goal of making you laugh and putting a smile on your face every day he was at work.

"Mike loved to tell stories. Most of them you had to listen to in private because his sense of humor was a little twisted, which is just how he liked it," Tom added. "Mike is an employee that I will always remember, and when I think of him it puts a smile on my face. He will be truly missed by everyone he has worked with in Tahoma.

Coworker Kim Peltzer echoed those sentiments. "Mike is an amazing person and he is surrounded by an amazing family. His devotion to his family and friends was one of the most enduring elements I discovered while working with him. He had an inherent ability to encourage and support everyone around him," she said. "We shared countless conversations about how his family was doing. He was also a huge 'pest' and made sure that I took time for my health, as well. I truly miss our daily conversations."

Diane was well-loved by her teammates, too. Fellow driver Vicki Wood said "Diane is a wonderful lady, coworker and friend! She is so very thoughtful, always with a big smile and a 'good morning!' She is a woman of many talents," Vicki said. "She makes beautiful quilts and is a professional seamstress. One year she made me a beanie! We miss her already."

Bus driver and PSE Vice President Kerry Walstad said that Diane has been a dependable and dedicated bus driver for Tahoma. "Her attendance through the years is nothing short of impressive. I miss my friend, and I wish her all the happiness in her next adventure," Kerry said.

In retirement, the two plan to spend more time visiting family, traveling and socializing, once the pandemic allows. In the meantime, Diane will be quilting, and Mike is learning to play the piano and doing more photography.

The two drove all of the kids in their own neighborhood for many years. One morning, the two looked out their window to find chalk drawings from the students and families in their neighborhood. "You are amazing, kind and inspiring people," the writings said. The gesture meant a lot, Mike said.

Diane and Mike, we agree with those students -- your dedication, care and commitment to Tahoma students has been an inspiration. We thank you for each day and each mile, and we're so grateful you were part of our team. Happy retirement to you both!