

By Lori Pankonin

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I think back to a Red Carpet Service workshop in which several employees in area communities took part. The purpose focused on the front line people in the community who can make the first and only impression of a town.

If someone passing through stops for a purchase and the person who they pay is unfriendly, they can go away from that town with a negative image simply by that one contact. Or if the person has a question and the employee makes no effort to find an answer, an impression is made.

On the contrary, if someone is super friendly and goes above and beyond in offering service with a smile, the travelers might decide to stop for a bite to eat or even spend the night. Or they might continue to move on but take the impression with them about a friendly town (having talked to just a few people).

Such is the same when someone visits a church. No matter how much the sermon affected them, it's generally the way they are greeted and treated that makes the difference in their worship experience.

Looking back, my grandson absolutely loved the days when he got to ride the county handi-bus from preschool to daycare. Marv, the driver, was like a hero to him. One thing you didn't want to do was change the plan and pick him up instead when he was counting on the ride.

And in talking to Marvin Hamilton, you could tell it was a highlight for him. He watches the clock, taking his responsibility seriously to be at the right place at the right time to take these youngsters safely to their next destination.

It's not uncommon for Marv to offer treats and he has had a lot of laughs about comments or songs from his young buddies. Every year, he provides pizza for each of the preschools where he makes stops. When he won a gingerbread house, all the kids joined in the fun of his win.

Kids aren't his only riders. He helps the elderly and any age in between with tasks like carrying groceries or helping someone put on their jewelry

before venturing out.

Other drivers take on these tasks as well, however, I've been made aware of the difference Marv makes in many young lives because of my grandchildren.

He definitely offers an extra special touch in carrying out his responsibilities.

Our grandchildren were living in another community when Tayvin, age 3, saw a handi-bus there. "Is that Marv?" she exclaimed, somewhat disappointed to learn that it wasn't. She had never actually been a passenger on one of Marv's journeys but she felt the delight of it all through her older brother.

Austin, age 6, rides the handi-bus to school on a regular basis now. I asked him the driver's name. He doesn't know. There are several. He has been forgotten three times, making him late to school. I've heard his mother say more than once, "I miss Marv!"

Here's to Marv and all the other Marvs in the world who go above and beyond in providing a positive spark and making a difference by going the extra mile with kindness and compassion.

Chances are, when you make someone else's day, it will also feel good for you. There's just nothing like service with a smile!!