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NEWS >>

TEAMSTERS LOCAL 179 BUS DRIVER, MONITOR SAVE CHILDREN FROM FIRE

Members' Heroism Prime Example of Teamster Commitment to School Bus Safety

Monday, May 22, 2017 was just a normal day for First Student Bus Driver Monica Lally and Monitor Joyce Marfell. They were on their way to Patterson Elementary School, transporting four students as they normally do. But then, disaster struck unexpectedly.

Lally and Marfell were on their way to pick up the fifth and final student when Lally noticed smoke coming from the hood of the vehicle.

"I radioed to the yard to make sure they knew about the situation. The smoke started and quickly grew, and then it turned black," Lally said. "I turned to Joyce, and I said, 'It's time to evacuate.' This is the first time anything like this has ever happened. I'm glad everyone ended up being OK."

Lally immediately pulled over. Marfell sprang into action, getting the seatbelts off of the students in minutes, even though she said it seemed like an eternity. Lally and Marfell then assisted the students to jump out of the back of the bus. Timing was critical — shortly after the students were off the bus and on the curb, the engine caught fire and the bus was engulfed in flames.

"Make no mistake about it, Monica Lally and Joyce Marfell are heroes – to their students, to their coworkers, to the entire community," said Tom Flynn, President of Teamsters Local 179, which represents the school bus drivers and monitors. "Thanks to the courage and professionalism of these First Student workers, the students not only escaped a dangerous situation unharmed, but were even able to make it to school for the day."

Lally pointed to the incident as an example of why it's important to be ready for anything on the job.

"Be ready to do what you need to do," Lally said. "Don't hesitate to tell someone if something doesn't seem right. Better to be safe than sorry."

Marfell noted that the parents, the school and First Student were all very grateful for the way they had acted in response to the fire. She also stressed the importance of being prepared for emergencies.

"When you get in that situation, just stay calm, take a deep breath and focus on what you have to do," Marfell said. "Try not to think about what's going on outside of work, just focus on the kids and helping out your driver, keep the kids calm and stay positive, and everything will be fine."

Teamsters Local 179 is an affiliate of Teamsters Joint Council 25, America's premier labor union for Chicago, Illinois and northwest Indiana.