DAILY Southtown

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Pace bus driver from Dolton recognized

Has been driving for years without having accident

By Elena Tittel
DAILY SOUTHTOWN

While some people may only drive a couple of hundred thousand miles in their lifetime, Pixley Hodges has driven millions.

Hodges was one of 22 Pace bus drivers inducted into the National Safety Council's Million Mile Club earlier this month.

To qualify, bus drivers must have been driving for at least 12.5 years without a preventable accident. Two million milers need at least 25 years without an accident, and three million milers need at least 37.5 years without an accident. Only about 15% have achieved Hodges's milestone as a three million miler, said Melinda Metzger, executive director of Pace Suburban Bus.

"(Hodges) is one of the best. He is serving the public safely, and he treats them with respect. In turn, they treat him with respect," Metzger said. "I'm so proud of him, and I've known him for his whole career. He's just a great operator and a great person."

Pace bus serves 274 municipalities across Cook, DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry and Will counties. Pace's South Division, based in Markham, serves the south and southwest suburbs of Cook County, DuPage County and Chicago's South Side, according to the company's website.

Hodges, a 70-year-old Dolton resident, began driving soon after his 21st birthday, the minimum age requirement to become a Pace bus driver. His uncle, William Young, was a public transportation enthusiast and driver himself who encouraged Hodges to move from Chicago to the south suburbs.

Hodges said from day one, the job has been about more than being a driver, but rather an operator serving the public. Even decades later,

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Pixley Hodges, 70, is one of 22 new inductees into the National Safety Council's Million Mile Club. **PACE SUBURBAN BUS**



Chicago High School for Agricultural Sciences student Jemyah Meeks helps prepare food during a community Thanksgiving dinner for about 450 diners Tuesday at the school in the Mount Greenwood neighborhood of Chicago. **JANICE NEUMANN/DAILY SOUTHTOWN**

Turkey, trimmings on table

Students serve up early Thanksgiving

By Janice Neumann
FOR THE DAILY SOUTHTOWN

Hundreds of older residents of the area around Mt. Greenwood were treated to an early Thanksgiving dinner with all the trimmings served up by students at Chicago High School for Agricultural Sciences.

But this wasn't just service with a smile. The students also cooked the feast, and before that, they helped raise the livestock and crops used in the traditional Thanksgiving dishes.

While they seemed to enjoy providing a hearty meal to people who appreciated their efforts, the students said their work was helping to open doors for them as well.

"You get to explore your options and expand your horizons," said Jemyah Meeks, a senior in the Food Science pathway, as she helped prepare the meal.

Fellow student Kimora Taylor, 16, was happy to be there too.

"It's pretty fun, even though it's time-consuming," Taylor said as she assembled cutlery and napkin setups along with student Ismael Valdes, 17. "It's overall great to help out."

The pre-Thanksgiving feast has been offered for the past 14 years and attracted roughly 450 diners this time.

Ald. Matt O'Shea, 19th Ward, helps organize and host the event.

"This effectively will be their Thanksgiving," O'Shea said. "Many of these seniors will spend next Thursday alone. They really appreciate the fact that the kids care."

The campus of Chicago High School for Agricultural Sciences, a Chicago Public School magnet school, includes roughly 40 acres of land, with agriculture and grazing fields, a barn and indoor classroom spaces and teaching kitchens. It also has the only working farm in Chicago's city limits. There are typically horses, cows, pigs, alpaca, and turkeys and chickens, though this year's fowl have already been "processed."

The school also has Chicago Public Schools' largest cohort of special education students,

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WILL COUNTY

Board OKs no levy increase, rejects cut

By Michelle Mullins
FOR THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE

The Will County Board voted Thursday to hold the line on property taxes and approved no increase to the property tax levy as County Executive Jennifer Bertino-Tarrant proposed in her August budget address.

Board Republicans asked for a 2% reduction of the property tax levy that failed along party lines. In the proposal, the corporate levy would have been reduced from $108.2 million, to nearly $106.1 million.

If the 2% reduction passed, County Treasurer Tim Brophy said the savings for his home would have been about $8.

But Exxon Mobil, the county's leading tax payer, would have saved about $21,000 in property taxes, Brophy said.

County Board member Dawn Bullock said the levy reduction is not significant savings for the homeowner. The county is one line item on the tax bill, the Plainfield Democrat said, and the reduction puts more money in corporate pockets, not residents.

Democratic board member Jackie Traynere, of Bolingbrook, said the county could legally levy up to 2.7%, the consumer price index, but has opted for no tax increases. She said the board can't vote to approve new hires and labor union contracts while also supporting reduced revenue.

Frankfort Republican member Dan Butler said some members of the Republican Caucus wanted deeper cuts, but arrived at the 2% levy reduction.

"We don't want to hurt essential services," Butler said.

Before the vote, Sunny Hill Nursing Home administrator Maggie

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Cook County easily passes Preckwinkle's budget



Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle speaks during a board meeting on Thursday. **ANTONIO PEREZ/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

Board president gets $9.76B OK'd

By A.D. Quig
CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle's $9.76 billion "built to withstand" budget for 2027 — which she likened to a recently renovated home being hit with flooding in the basement and a tree through the roof — passed unanimously and without major amendments on Thursday.

Her package is smaller than last year, slightly shrinking the county's overall head count to about 23,800 and using stopgap measures to help plug a $550 million deficit without higher taxes or layoffs.

Preckwinkle's team blamed two major blows outside its control for the budget gap: a lawsuit halted the use of transportation dollars for public safety offices and federal healthcare changes are expected to cut reimbursements and drive up the cost of caring for uninsured and underinsured patients at Cook County Health's clinics and hospitals.

Personnel costs also have climbed, thanks to automatic cost-of-living increases for county workers. Adopted personnel budgets have climbed from $2.17 billion in 2022 to $2.89 billion for next year.

Closing the gap without major cuts or new or increased taxes was the "result of more than a decade of hard work," Preckwinkle said during Thursday's board meeting, including efforts to pay long-term debts, put money into pensions and build reserves. "We said that discipline today would protect us tomorrow. This year, tomorrow arrived and we were ready," she said.

Still, Preckwinkle has laid the groundwork for a potential tax hike when 2028 rolls around. "Next year will be harder. Federal cuts to healthcare are still growing," she said. "Pressures on our healthcare system are not going away. Some of the ways we used to close this year's gap can only be used once. I've said that in many ways we've swept the cupboards bare."

The budget passed unanimously, with two absences. Commissioner Donna Miller, newly elected to Congress, was in Washington D.C., and Commissioner Stanley Moore had a family emergency.

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