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When Marilee Mayes retires next week as general manager of Durham School Services' contract in Hutchinson, Kan., she like many of her peers nationwide won't be leaving the industry she's come to love. She will remain with the company as a substitute school bus driver.

"Marilee is the type of person who stays committed to her responsibilities and serves the community with all
her heart," said Durham Region Manager Kevin Rhine. "She knows Hutchinson school transportation like no one
ever has. The community is a better place because of Marilee."

Mayes started her career in 1979 as a school bus driver, and by 1986 Durham had appointed her as general manager for the transportation of students attending Hutchinson Union School District 308 near Wichita. Mayes' "expertise and wealth of knowledge is too valuable for the company to let her leave altogether," according to a Durham corporate statement.

Mayes said it will be strange once she retires on Feb. 23 but that she is looking forward to it.

"Anyone who's been a general manager knows it's a lot of hours and a lot of hard work, so it will be nice to relax a little and spend time with family," said Mayes, a classically trained musician."I earned my degree in music education at Wichita State University, so I've always enjoyed music.

I've been a bassoonist in the Hutchinson Symphony off and on for three decades, so I may do more there."

Her ties to Durham will also remain strong via her husband George, who is the Hutchinson facility's lead mechanic. The couple will celebrate their 40th wedding anniversary in September and have three grown children and 10 grandchildren with another on the way.

After giving back to the community for more than 25 years, Marilee says it is what she has received in return that has been the most special. "I've met so many great people," she said, "from parents, to the people at the schools, to the employees here operating the bus service. They have all been so friendly, patient and understanding while being great examples for me. I love what I do, and enjoy being part of the community."

Durham announced its new Hutchinson general manager will be local businessman Don Weigel, who joined the team on Feb. 18.