

# New Braunfels, Canyon Lake businesses come together to honor bus drivers

By Catherine Wilson The Herald-Zeitung Aug 24, 2022 0



School buses drive through a 48-foot balloon arch at Mountain Valley Middle School Tuesday, August 23, 2022 in Canyon Lake.

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From left, Dakota Monfils and Bill Allen unload parts of their 48-foot balloon arch at Mountain Valley Middle School Tuesday, August 23, 2022 in Canyon Lake.

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Not even rain could stop the hard-working hands of the employees of Balloon Man as they worked diligently to erect the towering black and gold arch made of balloons.

Soaked to the bone, their hard work paid off and they got to watch in satisfaction as the buses at Mountain Valley Middle School passed through the arch to honor bus drivers during a time when districts are experiencing shortages.

It all started with a Facebook post.

The business specializing in balloon displays located down the street from the middle school posted in the Facebook group Everything Canyon Lake TX offering one of its arches at half price after a cancellation.

Vanessa Velasquez, a bus driver for New Braunfels ISD, replied to the post suggesting the balloon business do something special for bus drivers on the first day of school.

“I work for the NBISD Transportation Department,” Velasquez said. “Our bus drivers and bus aides are extremely hard workers and what I believe to be the backbone of our department. I’d just love to do things to appreciate them.”

While the arch didn’t find its way to New Braunfels ISD, her message was received loud and clear.

Two businesses stepped up and split the cost of the arch, including Debbie England, who owns a local auto repair shop.

“I know right now that there’s places that aren’t covered by service and bus drivers themselves — it’s gonna be a hard year,” England said. “It’s the first day of school and it just seemed like a good idea.”



Bill Allen, right, and Dakota Monfils unload parts of their balloon arch at Mountain Valley Middle School Tuesday, August 23, 2022 in Canyon Lake.

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Bill Allen adds balloons to the balloon arch at Mountain Valley Middle School Tuesday, August 23, 2022 in Canyon Lake.

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Without hesitation, Bill Allen, the balloon man himself, said he would make it happen — and after a little finessing, the arch celebrating some of Comal ISD’s bus drivers came to life.

The original design’s height would not support the height required for buses to pass through, so Allen, at no additional charge, added more balloons to double the size.

“With everything (bus drivers) have been going through with the schools having a shortage of bus drivers, and bus drivers having to pull double duty, they’re just having to work extra hard and they don’t get paid enough,” Allen said. “(We) just kind of wanted to celebrate (the first day of school).”

In response to the district’s bus driver shortage, Comal ISD implemented no service zones, cutting down 12-15 bus routes — the adjustment impacting schools in rural areas most.

When district administrators decided to move forward with the no service area plan, the district was short 25 drivers. The district is continuing to work on hiring more drivers to support its growing population.