

# Bus driver follows path to victory

## Columbia man places first in annual competition for drivers

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Central Midlands Regional Transit Authority bus driver Phillip ‘Pat’ Patterson finishes his route on Broad River Road. Last week, Patterson took first place in the American Public Transportation Association’s International Bus Rodeo in California.



There’s a champion behind the wheel of the transit authority’s bus 107.

For the past 26 years, **Phillip “Pat” Patterson** has been transporting Columbia-area commuters around town as part of a fleet of drivers for the area’s bus system. Now, the Central Midlands Regional Transit Authority driver has established himself among the nation’s best.

Patterson claimed first-place honors in the American Public Transportation Association’s 25th annual International Bus Roadeo in California last week. The win marked a first for a South Carolina driver.

“I feel like I just won the Academy Awards,” said Patterson, who won in the 35-foot bus operator category.

Patterson, who lives in Northeast Richland, qualified for the national event after claiming top honors in the S.C. Bus Roadeo last fall.

Earning a place among the nation’s elite was no easy maneuver.

In bus rodeos, drivers must safely navigate their buses forward and backward through narrowly positioned traffic cones while moving through winding courses that sometimes go up or down hills.

The drivers are judged on the number of cones hit and the amount of time required to complete the maneuvers.

“In this competition every second counts” Patterson said.

In the national event, Patterson received 552 out of a possible 650 points, narrowly edging the second-place finisher by two points.

“Last year I placed 11th so I wasn’t looking for a first, only hoping to place in the top 5.”

Patterson had won the state title five times.

“We couldn’t be more proud,” said CMRTA board chairman **Pat Smith**, who received news of Patterson’s win just after midnight May 2 after the victory. “I don’t mind being woken up for news like this.”

Patterson is assigned to Crosstown Route 36, a connector route that runs from Bluff Road near Williams-Brice Stadium to Harbison Boulevard. In his 26 years as a driver — initially for SCE&G and eventually for the transit authority — he has driven each of the system’s nearly 30 routes.

In winning the national event, Patterson earned \$1,000, a championship ring and a trophy.

He’s already thinking ahead to next year’s event — possibly in the 40-foot bus category. But for now, he’ll settle for transporting passengers rather than dodging cones.

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