

School district hires company to train crossing guards

By Kathryn Worrall

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Apparently, there's more to a crossing guard than wearing a neon vest and holding a stop sign.

The job is not just common sense.

“The difference between a close call and a tragedy is a split second and a well-trained crossing guard,” said Patricia Pohl, director of operations for All City Management Services, the largest private employer of school crossing guards in the country.

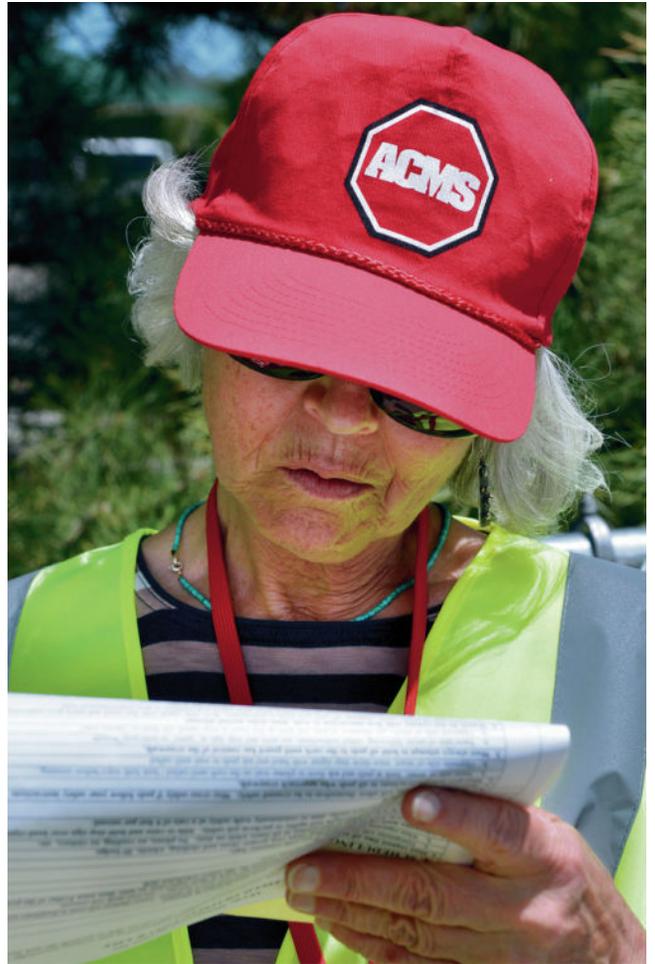
According to Pohl, crossing guards are “unspoken heroes” who must understand the rules of the road, retain control of the children and handle all traffic distractions — from angry drivers, stray dogs and eager children.

Moreover, “This isn't an office job,” Pohl said. “If you are late, someone else can't just answer the phone. You leave the kids on their own.”

This year, Santa Fe Public Schools is contracting with the family-owned All City Management Services to train and manage crossing guards for 29 busy intersections at a cost of \$224,000.

Gabe Romero, director of safety and security for the district, decided to privatize the crossing guards so he could better balance his other responsibilities — emergency management, crisis preparedness and school security — while being confident the crossing guards would do their jobs efficiently.

“We did a RFP [request for proposal],” Romero said. “After looking at their portfolio, we called several of their references, and every one of them responded unanimously that they were very happy with All City Management.”



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Harriet Rosenstein, who is training to become a crossing guard for the school district, reads training material last Friday during class on Camino Carlos Ray. Clyde Mueller/The New Mexican

All City Management Services employs more than 3,000 trained guards. It was founded in 1985 and is headquartered in Santa Fe Springs, Calif. Typically, the company recruits personnel, handles background checks, training, payroll and administrative support. It also finds substitutes, investigates complaints and resolves problems.

While the company trained guards at a park intersection on Friday afternoon, a Santa Fe man approached Pohl, worried about his beloved, local crossing guard, “Freddie,” and his future career as a crossing guard.

“He even asks each kid if he’s done his homework!” the man said.

Pohl was quick to assure him that Freddie’s job was safe.

“We’ve absorbed existing guards — we didn’t clean house,” Pohl said.

Existing guards earn \$13 an hour, while newcomers start at \$12.50. Each guard works two hours a day, one before and one after school.

One of the trainees, Ryan Kearney, 33, is a sophomore nursing major at Santa Fe Community College. Kearney applied for the job because it fits “perfectly” with his school schedule, but was surprised at how challenging it is.

“You look at it from the outside like, anyone can do that,” Kearney said. “But the responsibility is there — for the kids, yourself and the drivers.”

Harriet Rosenstein, 71, another trainee, wanted an outdoors job, and also is excited for school vacation days, the large gap of time between work hours, and a chance to serve the community and children.

All City Management Services “has a really fantastic manual for the crossing guards,” Romero said. “It’s a very professional organization.”

The company looks for crossing guards who are confident, authoritative, professional and dedicated. Though most of the positions are filled, there are still a few available. To apply, visit the company website at thecrossingguardcompany.com/employment_opportunities.

School begins Aug. 14 for grades 1 to 12.