

Feature Writing

District Meet • 2025



You are a reporter for the **Leaguetown Press**, the student newspaper of Leaguetown High School.

From the given information, write a **feature story** as you would for the high school newspaper. You may use statements attributed to individuals as **direct or indirect quotes**. You may not change the meaning of a statement. You have **one hour**.

Do not write your name or the name of your school on this sheet or your entry. **Put your number on your paper.**

Leaguetown High School has 782 students in grades 9-12. Sophomore Julie Hansen has ridden Bus 8 with Danny Critchfield as her bus driver since she was in sixth grade.

Last Monday, Hansen boarded the bus and sat in her typical seat in the second row. About 25 minutes into her 45-minute ride home, Hansen noticed the bus was veering off the road and headed toward a stop sign on Lakegrove Street, but the bus wasn't slowing down. When Hansen yelled for Critchfield she saw him slumped against the window with his hand on his chest. Hansen asked another student to call 911 while she jumped around the seat in front of her. As the bus crashed into the stop sign, she hit the brake pedal with as much pressure as she could. The bus slid into the ditch and came to a stop. After she stopped the bus, Hansen removed the key and turned to see that Critchfield was still breathing but was struggling to stay conscious. Hansen opened the door to the bus for the other 17 passengers to evacuate and wait for a bus to pick them up. Hansen remained on the bus with Critchfield. Paramedics arrived after a few minutes and said the bus driver was having a heart attack. They transported him to the hospital for treatment.

No passengers were injured. Critchfield survived and will take a month off to recover. Mayor Micah Bloomfield will honor Hansen with the Hometown Hero Award before the city council meeting on Monday, March 31. Critchfield will be there to help present the award.

You are writing for the issue of the Press to be distributed March 28.

■ JULIE HANSEN, sophomore

"I was looking out the window when it felt like we were starting to veer off the road. I glanced up and saw we were headed straight for a stop sign, but we weren't slowing down at all. The bus started bouncing up and down because we drove across those bumpy lines on the highway that are supposed to keep people awake. That's when I saw Mr. Danny slouched down against the window and grabbing his chest.

"I jumped up and asked Peter Vanlandingham in the seat across from mine to call 911. As I got to the drivers' seat, we crashed through the stop sign. It made a sound like someone was throwing bricks at the bus, but it didn't seem to do too much damage. I kicked Mr. Danny's foot off the gas pedal and stomped my foot on the brakes as hard as I could — finally, the bus skidded into the ditch and stopped. That was the scariest moment of my life so far. I have no idea how buses work, but I'm in driver's ed now. At least I could see the difference between gas and brakes.

"As soon as I got the key out of the ignition, I turned my attention to Mr. Danny. He couldn't talk, but he looked me straight in the eye. I tried to smile to make him feel calm. I told him to breathe until an ambulance could get

■ JULIE HANSEN, continued

there. The whole thing was over in about two minutes, but to me, it felt like years. The important thing is that everyone got off the bus with no injuries and that Mr. Danny is going to be OK.

“He’s been my bus driver for four years now. He’s a quiet man. He doesn’t spend a lot of time talking to the students, but he always smiles when I get on the bus. I always tell him ‘thank you’ when I get off. He’s always been a kind person to all of us. That’s why I couldn’t leave him there on the bus alone. He’s a good person who deserved some care and compassion during that time. I didn’t think it was a big deal that I stopped the bus. Anyone could have done that, but I was happy to be there with Mr. Danny in those few minutes before the ambulance got there — even if it was just to make him feel more comfortable or less afraid.”

■ DANNY CRITCHFIELD, bus driver

“I don’t remember much of anything from that afternoon except when Julie Hansen looked down at me and smiled. I don’t think she said any words, but in that moment, looking at her face, I could tell that the students were safe. That’s all I cared about. I wanted to make sure those students were safe.

“She has always been a pleasant passenger to have on the bus, but she’s more than a passenger to me now. She’s a blessing. I’m taking some time off to recover, but I hope to come back to my route before the end of the year. Spending time around the students is good for my heart, I think. They keep me young, anyway. I’m looking forward to helping present her with a special award from the mayor. I’m not sure I would be here if it weren’t for her quick thinking, and the situation on the bus could have been much worse for the students as well. I hope she’s still riding my bus when I get back to work. I’ll thank her every day she gets on.”

■ PETER VANLANDINGHAM, junior

“Everyone sits in silence with airbuds in when we’re on the bus. Before Julie screamed at me, I hadn’t even realized what was happening. I was just watching videos on my phone — in my own little world. I guess this is a good lesson to be more aware of our surroundings. We’re all lucky that Julie was aware that day. When I called 911, I told them something was wrong with our bus driver, but that another student seemed to have everything under control on the bus. By the time I told them where we were, she had the bus stopped in the ditch and had pulled out the keys. I don’t know Julie that well, but I’m glad we ride the same bus.”

■ MICAH BLOOMFIELD, mayor

“It’s not every day we have a true hero in our high school. We see car accidents now and then, but when we have something like a medical situation on a school bus, that can become a very scary situation for students, parents and community members. The students on that bus and their bus driver needed a real hero that day. In this case, that hero was Julie. She represents the Hometown Hero mentality. It’s kindness and compassion. It’s putting others above yourself. Sometimes it seems like we’ve lost a lot of those characteristics in our society. Thanks to Julie, we can see it’s still out there.”

DO NOT DISTRIBUTE TO STUDENTS BEFORE OR DURING THE CONTEST!

District Meet • 2025 Feature Writing Contest Tips and Sample Story

Contest Director: Give one copy to each judge to use during critiquing/judging. Also, staple one copy of the contest and one copy of the contest tips to each student's returned entry. The purpose of the tips is to provide immediate feedback to students. However, it is not meant to replace written comments from the judge.

1. Figure out what the story is about and its theme or focus. This story is about a student who stopped a school bus when the bus driver had a heart attack.

2. The lead of a feature story must grab the reader's attention. It does not have to be a certain length or include the 5Ws and H. It should set a scene and get the reader into the story. Although you have freedom to describe the scene as you think it might have existed, try to stay close to the prompt. Judges will not want you to wander off the subject too much.

Still in driver's ed, sophomore Julie Hansen hadn't spent much time behind the wheel, but when her bus driver, Danny Critchfield, had a heart attack last week, she didn't hesitate.

When Hansen noticed the bus careening toward a stop sign at full speed, she yelled for Critchfield, who was slumped over holding his chest. She then rushed to the driver's seat, hitting the brake pedal as hard as she could as the bus crashed over the stop sign and slid into the ditch.

3. Once you get past the lead, make sure you include a nut graph. It tells the reader what the story will be about. Follow the nut graph with a direct quote and then go into the transition/quote formula.

nut graph

Hansen's maneuver saved her driver and all 17 passengers on board the bus, and on Monday, Mayor Micah Bloomfield will honor her with the Hometown Hero Award.

direct quote

"That was the scariest moment of my life so far," Hansen said. "I have no idea how buses work, but I'm in driver's ed now. At least I knew the difference between gas and brakes."

4. After the nut graph, the rest of the story can tell itself through the use of transition/quote formula. Be sure you attribute after the quote or at least after the first sentence. An attribution should be: subject of attribution followed by the verb of attribution ("Hansen said" not "said Hansen"). Avoid putting two or more quotes together without placing some kind of transition between them. Also, make sure transitions provide information to help the action of the story and that the quote does not repeat information in the transition.

transition/story-telling

Critchfield, who was taken to the hospital by ambulance, is recovering and said he will return to work as soon as he can.

direct quote

"I'm not sure I would be here if it weren't for her quick thinking, and the situation on the bus could have been much worse for the students as well," he said. "I hope she's still riding my bus when I get back to work. I'll thank her every day she gets on."

5. Always use third person. Don't say "our student" or "our students." Also, do not editorialize. For instance, you should not say "Go Julie!" These statements are personal opinions and should not be used in a feature story.

6. Always use the verb "said" as the verb of attribution. Don't say "says," "stated," "feels" or any other synonym for "said."

7. Finally, look for a strong quote to use as a closing statement or a statement that will bring the reader back to the beginning of the story. It should give the reader a sense of satisfaction or resolution.

Though he's still recovering, Critchfield said he'll be there to help present her award.

"She has always been a pleasant passenger to have on the bus, but she's more than a passenger to me now," he said. "She's a blessing."

SAMPLE STORY

Still in driver's ed, sophomore Julie Hansen hadn't spent much time behind the wheel, but when her bus driver, Danny Critchfield, had a heart attack last week, she didn't hesitate.

When Hansen noticed the bus careening toward a stop sign at full speed, she yelled for Critchfield, who was slumped over holding his chest. She then rushed to the driver's seat, hitting the brake pedal as hard as she could as the bus crashed over the stop sign and slid into the ditch.

Hansen's maneuver saved her driver and all 17 passengers on board the bus, and on Monday, Mayor Micah Bloomfield will honor her with the Hometown Hero Award.

"That was the scariest moment of my life so far," Hansen said. "I have no idea how buses work, but I'm in driver's ed now. At least I knew the difference between gas and brakes."

Critchfield, who was taken to the hospital by ambulance, is recovering and said he will return to work as soon as he can.

"I'm not sure I would be here if it weren't for her quick thinking, and the situation on the bus could have been much worse for the students as well," he said. "I hope she's still riding my bus when I get back to work. I'll thank her every day she gets on."

As Hansen took control of the bus, she directed junior Peter Vanlandingham to call for help.

"Before Julie screamed at me, I hadn't even realized what was happening," Vanlandingham said. "I was just watching videos on my phone, in my own little world. I guess this is a good lesson to be more aware of our surroundings."

After the bus came to a stop and as paramedics were on their way, Hansen found Critchfield was still breathing and opened the door for the other passengers to exit, staying on the bus with him until help arrived.

"I was happy to be there with Mr. Danny in those few minutes before the ambulance got there — even if it was just to make him feel more comfortable or less afraid," Hansen said.

Bloomfield said Hansen represents the "Hometown Hero" mentality through her actions.

"It's kindness and compassion," she said. "It's putting others above yourself. Sometimes it seems like we've lost a lot of those characteristics in our society. Thanks to Julie, we can still see it's out there."

Though he's still recovering, Critchfield said he'll be there to help present her award.

"She has always been a pleasant passenger to have on the bus, but she's more than a passenger to me now," he said. "She's a blessing."