

The Woodford Sun, Versailles, Kentucky Annual School Year Supplement



With 36 pages worth of vital information, *The Woodford Sun's* annual school guide is a must-have for parents, students, realtors, civic representatives, and business owners throughout Woodford County, Kentucky.

While not technically summer sections, back-to-school supplements are increasingly published in mid-summer to accommodate the growing number of school districts that have shifted their opening days to the second or third weeks of August. *The Woodford Sun*, which has produced a school year supplement for more than a dozen years, runs its section early in August — during the height of most newspapers' summer slump. The timing of its publication and the fact that the section is intended as a guide to the entire school year have proven to be a winning combination for both readers and advertisers.

According to Advertising Manager Margie Holbrook, the success of the newspaper's annual school guide also stems from the support of the Woodford County Public Schools, which provide the information, photos and school profiles that fill the 36-page tab. In addition to the descriptions of each school in the district, the section features schedules, faculty/staff directories, and calendars that students and parents will likely refer to a myriad of times from August through June.

Marla Carroll, the newspaper's Special Sections Coordinator, reaches out to her school board contact prior to the end of each school year to ensure that she gets the information she needs for the next year's section. This way, district officials have plenty of time to assemble and submit new information about schools, schedules, staffing changes and bus routes to the newspaper. Among the most popular features of *The Woodford Sun's* annual school supplement is a pullout guide to the area's school bus routes, which also features a directory, listing every school and district office in Woodford County.

Says Carroll, "The school board is extremely cooperative and supportive. Not only do they provide information, but they look over the section before it prints to make sure that everything is correct and has been updated where necessary."

Advertisers also play a key role in the school guide. In addition to those businesses that run ads throughout the section, there are others that sponsor its most popular features, such as the bus routes, school schedules, and photos of the schools' outstanding athletes and scholars. Since the basic layout and content of the guide does not change much, and the same advertisers generally support the section from year to year, Holbrook instituted a new strategy about three years ago to streamline the sales process.

"In the last few years, we started sending a letter to every advertiser in the section with a copy of their ad from the previous year along with the new price if our rates increased," she explains. "The letter tells them they can contact us if they are interested in advertising in the next issue. We get a great response to these letters — about 25 percent of the ads are sold this way — and some even send in a check with their request to rerun their ads from last year."

When Holbrook and her staff believe that a particular advertiser might be open to buying a larger ad than the year before, they forego the letter and call on the business owner in person.

"As strange as it may sound," she says, "we don't use computers in our advertising department. We have first-name relationships with our advertisers that begin as soon as they open their businesses, and we become part of their decision-making in terms of advertising because of the relationships we build. Even when advertisers email us, we pick up the phone to get back to them because we believe that's what it takes to do business in a small town."

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