

Buck Says: You Best Buckle Up

By Judi Brett

Buck-the-Buckle-Up Dog is a recognized figure in Cumberland County.

Buck travels to schools, libraries and county events to deliver the message, "Please buckle up every time you ride."

Children, who have previously met Buck at these events, run up to Buck, pat him or hug him and are rewarded with a slobbery kiss.

Buck-the-Buckle-Up-Dog is owned by Bill Garrison, Cumberland County Traffic Safety Coordinator.

"Buck's personality attracts people," states Bill which makes Buck an effective representative for Traffic Safety Bureau. "He's big and a bit goofy-looking which makes people of all ages approach him."

Buck's affable personality, floppy ears and soulful brown eyes create the perfect whimsical character of the series, *Adventures with Buck-the-Buckle-Up-Dog*.



Buck -the-Buckle-Up-Dog has a message for students and adults alike: Take the time to buckle your seat belt.

The books, aimed at early elementary students, stress five traffic safety rules:

1) buckle up

2) walk with facing traffic; ride with traffic

3) wear helmets

4) cross at intersections

5) be safe; be seen.

Each book, aimed at a different age group, stresses the same safety rules.

Ethan Conquers His Fear is for first graders and introduces the five rules.

Connor's New Amiga, a bilingual story is

pegged for second graders.

The third book available this fall, is directed toward grandparents and their grandchildren.

So how do students usually become acquainted with Buck?

After a teacher, librarian or the author/illustrator reads a Buck book to the classroom, Buck strolls in and waits patiently as the children pat him, hug him or sometimes, lie on top of him. Sometimes Buck's strongest reaction to all the attention is a loud

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yawn.

While on duty as a celebrity dog, Buck wears a vest which contains his trading cards, reflector tags, and window decals. These are awarded to children who recite the five safety rules.

The trading cards state Buck lives with his people, Bill and Chris and his "sis-ter,"

Stella. His interests are eating, chasing squirrels, chewing bones and meeting new people.

Buck-the-Buckle-Up-Dog has become the perfect messenger for spreading traffic safety messages to children. The program, which began with Buck as a cartoon figure in a coloring book, has expanded to include posters, bookmarks, crayons, and a soon-to-arrive plush Buck dog.

Buck has made a guest appearance on Perfil Latino television and this spring, student freeholders proclaimed Buck an honorary sheriff's officer. This summer, a poster depicting a beach scene with a cartoon Buck and Stella and a carload of surf boards, towels and dog tan lotion decorates stores, libraries and schools.

In the backseat of their convertible is a mysterious puppy, the nephew of Stella and Buck. This fall, the Traffic Safety will conduct a name-the-puppy-contest.

As for the reasoning behind the popularity and success of the Buck program, Bill credits it to the Buck task force. The task force, comprised of the author and illustrator of the Buck books, members of the sheriff's department and Millville Rescue



Bill Garrison, owner of Buck-the-Buckle-Up-Dog and Cumberland County Traffic Safety coordinator.

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Squad and others, create new ways to emphasize Buck's message.

Ray Reeve, senior highway traffic safety specialist for the state of New Jersey is quick to turn around and throw the credit right back toward Bill.

"Bill's unsurpassed leadership abilities (make everyone want to

get involved)," Reeve said. "Cumberland County bursts with refreshing, new ideas. Some people approach jobs with a passion.

"It's through Bill's passionate attention so many things are accomplished."

Diane Roberts, the illustrator of *Adventures with Buck-the-Buckle-Up-Dog*, the coloring book, and

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Buck even has a trading card.

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the posters considers her work most pleasurable.

"It's exciting to draw Buck," Roberts said. "The task force gives me the freedom to be creative, yet work with a good message."

Although Bill is involved in a multitude of events that involve bringing messages of safety to Cumberland County residents, Buck-the-Buckle-Up-Dog remains his favorite.

"Where else can a guy bring his dog with him to work?" Bill poignantly asks.

Look for Buck at community events, ask your children if they have met Buck and most importantly, follow Buck's message: "Buckle up every time you ride."

For more information about Buck the Buckle-Up Dog call the Cumberland County Sheriff's Traffic Safety Program at 856-453-0874.

A Few Facts About Buck

BORN: FEB. 25, 2004

BREED: DOBERMAN PINSCHER

**HOBBIES: EATING, CHASING SQUIRRELS,
CHEWING BONES, GOING FOR RIDES AND
WALKS, AND MEETING NEW PEOPLE**