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Bus barrels into house

Driver suffers broken leg, cuts and is listed in stable condition; no children were aboard the bus at the time of the accident

By **TYRONE TONY REED JR.**
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BEMIS - A Jackson-Madison County School bus driver was listed in stable condition Friday night as authorities continue to investigate what caused her bus to crash into a house on Gregg Street. No one else was injured in the Friday morning crash, but the house was knocked from its foundations.

Police said that the driver, Margaret Freda Oakley, 57, of Jackson, had just dropped off children from her early morning bus route at Bemis Intermediate School when the crash occurred.

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Doris Crow, of Bemis, said she was in the bedroom of the house on Gregg Street when the bus crashed.

"I had just woke up and I heard this awful sound," said Crow standing outside the house. "It felt like a big 'boom' and I didn't know what it was. I had never heard anything like that before."

[+ Zoom Photo](#)



KATIE MORGAN /The Jackson Sun

A school bus driver in Bemis hit a mailbox, a street sign and then crashed into the front of the house at 14 Gregg St. after passing out while driving on Friday morning.

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When Crow looked out the window, she saw the yellow bus sitting in the front yard against the house. The impact had ripped a pillar that supported the front porch and caused it to settle upright near the front door.

Police said Oakley was headed south on Gregg Street around 7 a.m. at the time of the accident. Witnesses said Bus 102 started veering to the left,

Lt. Rick Holt said Friday.

"The bus struck a mailbox at 102 Gregg St., then struck a stop sign at (the intersection of) D Street and Gregg Street," Holt said. "After barely missing a tree, it struck the northwest corner of 14 Gregg St."

There were no children on the bus at the time of the accident, but Oakley "was really concerned about the well being of the children," Holt said.

"Her first words to us on the scene were 'Were there any kids on the bus,' and she had just dropped them off," Holt said.

Oakley suffered a broken leg and a cut on her head in the crash. She had surgery on her leg at Jackson-Madison County General Hospital later Friday.

The cause of the crash "appears to be some sort of medical condition," Holt said. "She said she simply didn't remember anything."

Holt said that he doesn't believe that Oakley will face any charges.

Schools Superintendent Nancy Zambito said that she was informed about the accident Friday morning and that she is grateful that the driver suffered only minor injuries.

"We are very grateful that nobody else was injured," Zambito said. "We feel terrible for the people who lived at that house."

Zambito said that she was told that another bus driver was right behind Oakley when the accident occurred.

"The driver in the other bus said that they had just dropped off some students,"



The house was knocked from its foundation when the bus collided with the porch.

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Zambito said.

Transportation Supervisor Grant Ward said Oakley has been driving for the school system for 24 years and has never had an accident like this before.

"She's a good driver, has a good driving history and is a good worker," said Ward, who has been supervisor since the Fall of 2006. "I'm just glad there weren't any children on the bus."

A similar accident occurred last February, when a school bus driver apparently blacked out and struck two vehicles - a Jackson Energy Authority vehicle and a passenger van - before colliding with the southeast side of Jackson-Central Merry High School's vocational building. The bus was not carrying any students.

Ward said that drivers under age 55 have an annual physical at the beginning of the school year, while drivers over 55 are examined twice a year.

"(Oakley) had her physical at the beginning of the school year," Ward said. "She did pass her physical."

School bus drivers are also required to hold a commercial driver's license along with a passenger endorsement and a bus endorsement, which Oakley does hold, Ward said.

Ward said that drivers are required to attend an annual in-service, which is conducted by the Department of Safety, to keep their endorsement.

"We send about 30 drivers a month to that because we can't send them all at one time," Ward said. "But, they do all attend the in-service."

Ward said that the school system currently has about 180 drivers, including part-timers and substitutes.

While Crow and her daughter, Lisa Thompson, who was also inside the house at the time of the crash, are thankful that they were not injured, they are sad that their house was damaged and several items inside were destroyed.

"It's bad," said Crow, surrounded by pieces of wood from the tree the bus scrapped. "I don't know what we are going to do. The house has been knocked off its foundation. We can't do anything until the insurance adjuster arrives."

Thompson said that she has been living in the house for three years. She declined further comment. Crow said the house was built in 1926.

Maintenance crews from the school system propped the top of the porch up with wood beams to keep it from falling once the bus was towed away. A JEA worker also came to the scene to make sure there wasn't a gas leak due to the

house shifting from the impact of the crash.

Visit jacksonsun.com and share your thoughts.


- Tyrone Tony Reed Jr., 425-9758


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