I have been at ISU for 32 years. In my time here, I have accumulated countless stories of good people doing good things for my beloved university, but the response this past week to a student crisis by staff at Transportation Services and Risk Management was nothing short of heroic.

Cyclone Rocketry was in Las Cruces, New Mexico, to participate in the Spaceport America Cup, the largest academic rocketry contest in the world. On Thursday, June 22nd, at approximately 6:30 AM, an ISU van carrying nine students was involved in a collision. Nobody was seriously injured, but the van was disabled, and the students were stranded 1,500 miles from Ames. My first call was to Tim Gleason at Transportation Services, and he immediately consulted his office peers to devise a rescue plan. Butch Hansen interrupted his vacation to provide advice and empower Transportation Services staff to take any necessary action. Jeremy Paul, the new director of Transportation Services, also called just to assure me his staff was on top of the situation.

Meanwhile, Cally Jennett from Risk Management responded so quickly to students’ calls for help that she could provide all necessary insurance information in real-time while police were still on the scene. She answered all the students’ questions and told them exactly what to do. Later that evening, when a student was experiencing neck pain, she assured the student it was OK to seek medical attention and the matter of “who pays” would be addressed later. Thankfully, the student was fine, but being reassured that her injuries were not serious helped tremendously.

Incredibly, Transportation Services had a new van delivered to the students just 20 hours after the collision. This is especially remarkable considering that Las Cruces is an 18-hour drive from Ames. Since they used a flatbed truck to deliver the van, they had a convenient way to return the disabled van to Ames. It was an elegant and efficient solution. That evening, well after business hours, Tim Gleason called me again, just to make certain that the students were OK and to see if we needed anything else. I was pleased to tell him all was well. The students returned to Ames, just a few hours ago, with no further incident.

On behalf of Cyclone Rocketry, their advisers, and all our families, please accept our sincerest gratitude. From our perspective, it was as if ISU dropped everything it was doing, and we were all that mattered.

-Bill Diesslin, Director, Environmental Health and Safety