



Operating Above the Standard

Public Transportation News



The Wheel

The Wheel is published quarterly & mailed free of charge to active OATS Transit riders, legislators, current funding sources & other interested people in the 87 county service area. It is mailed third class bulk postage paid at Columbia. If your name is misspelled or address has changed, please call your local OATS Transit office or email the editor.

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OATS, Inc. (dba OATS Transit) is a private, not-for-profit transportation provider serving 87 Missouri counties. Transportation is available to the general public in rural areas. In urban areas (Columbia, St. Louis, St. Joseph, Springfield, Kansas City) service is limited & not available to the general public. Contact your local OATS Transit office for service available to you, or to enter into an agreement to pay for services. Individuals and agencies may contract with OATS Transit for transportation.

OATS Transit operates its programs and services without regard to race, color, and national origin in accordance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act. We are an equal opportunity employer M/F/H/V.

Relay Missouri is available to individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind, and/or speech impaired. Use the Relay Missouri service by calling 711 to talk with an OATS representative or to schedule your trip.

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Board Meetings are held at the Home Office in Columbia and are open to the public. Contact the Home Office for meeting dates.

Bus Schedules & fare information can be found at:

www.oatstransit.org/schedules

Development Office: 888-875-6287

Follow us on social media:
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Honoring our Veterans

At OATS Transit, we feel it is an honor to not only have so many Veterans working for us, but to be able to provide transportation to our Veteran riders. We transport hundreds of Veterans to Veterans Hospitals & Clinics and provide service to many Veterans Homes in Missouri.

OATS Transit has a great Veteran recruitment program. We are happy to say more than 18% of our staff are Veterans. Additionally, many of our riders are Veterans. Several of our drivers and riders have been honored by Honor Flight- a non-profit network that transports our heroes to Washington D.C. several times each year in honor of all the sacrifices they have made.

Drivers from Columbia participate in a special Veterans project each Spring. We ensure transportation to the Entrepreneurship Bootcamp for Veterans hosted by The University of Missouri's College of Business. The aim of the program is to open the door to economic opportunity for Veterans by developing their competencies in creating and sustaining an entrepreneurial venture. Our drivers are happy to help out dedicating extra hours during nights and weekends!



It is truly an honor to work with, and assist, so many of you who are willing to sacrifice your lives to give us freedom. So, not only on Veterans Day November 11th, but every day, we salute you!

Pictured: Top; Drivers Rod McBreaity-Laclede Co. & Bill Bess-Moniteau Co. at Honor Flight in D.C. August 2019. Left; Veterans attending EBV in Columbia.



OATS Transit Turns 48

OATS Transit was incorporated on September 1, 1971, and our first bus was purchased and registered on November 16th. We are nearing a big milestone. In 2021, OATS Transit will turn 50! To help us prepare for the celebration, we would like you to submit stories, poems, photos or a brief sentence on what OATS Transit means to you. We will be putting together a special keep-sake using the content you share. To submit, you can email Brittany at bbussey@oatstransit.org or mail items to the OATS Transit Home Office: 2501 Maguire Blvd. Columbia, MO 65201. Please call us at 573-443-4516 if you have any questions.



Planning Ahead is Key

OATS Transit is more than half-way through the statewide implementation of our new scheduling and dispatching system. We understand that change, big or small, can be difficult. Many frustrations reported by some riders stem from the fact that you now must plan out your trip before the OATS Transit vehicle shows up at your door.

This new software is affecting the way that rides must be scheduled and our vehicles are dispatched. The outcome will be greater efficiencies in our entire system and better use of available funding resources. Most riders have been used to free/reduced cost rides compared to other public transportation providers, but that is only because we have funders paying part of the cost of

the trip. What you may not know is that those agencies also need to reduce their expenses so they can continue to operate in the future—just like us. Unfortunately that means we have less funding to cover the full cost of your trip. Our goal is to continue providing the same level of routes, schedules and trips that we have been without having to significantly reduce our service.

Below are some things you can do that will help you, our office staff and our drivers:

- Plan your trip in advance. Planning includes any en-route stops such as the bank or other errands you will need to do while out. All stops must be scheduled before you get on the vehicle. You will need to provide the scheduler with detailed information when you call. Our vehicles must run on schedule so they stay on time.
- Call your local OATS Transit office to schedule your trip. In the past, you may have scheduled with a volunteer, driver or third party. We know this is a big change for many but is necessary in order to create efficiencies as mentioned above. If you need assistance making a call, or reminders from someone, let us know. We will try to connect you with someone who can assist you. We are upgrading our phone capacity to better handle calls so if you currently experience difficulty getting through to dispatch, know that this issue will soon be resolved.
- If hearing or talking on the phone is difficult for you, Missouri has an excellent free resource to anyone who is hearing or speech impaired. Simply dial 711, or go online to www.relaymissouri.com to sign up for the service. They will assist you with your communication needs.
- Know your local schedule. You can find these online at www.oatstransit.org, or by requesting one from your local OATS Transit office or a driver.
- Plan ahead for fares. Our drivers cannot make change, so you will need the exact fare when boarding the bus. We have fare cards available in many areas, or you can pay in advance for trips by calling your local office.
- Please be patient with us. We know that is hard to hear, but if you give this new process time to work, you will see the benefits for everyone involved!

The goal with the new system is to increase productivity and improve efficiency in service. We also want to be able to handle more riders with better routing of vehicles as well as operate with less funding resources and less backtracking with our vehicles. This means there will be less paperwork for our drivers so they can spend more time focused on driving and taking care of your needs.

“We appreciate everyone’s patience as we work our way through the learning curve with the new system,” said Dorothy Yeager, OATS Transit Executive Director. “I know in some areas it’s been a painful transition and I’m truly sorry for any inconvenience this may have caused. But, I cannot stress enough how this is the first step towards our vision of less paperwork, reduced costs and, ultimately, a more robust and efficient transit service.”

Pictured: Northeast Region Area Manager Samantha Ratliff.

Partnering with Food Pantries Increases Access to Healthy Food

By: Brittany Bussey

Limited access to healthy food affects people's ability to have a complete and balanced diet. This places more children and adults at risk of obesity and many other diet-related health conditions.

It's a known fact that lack of transportation creates a barrier for many people to reach Missouri's food banks and pantries. In fact, Missouri ranks among the top ten states with the highest percentage of food-insecure households according to the Missouri Hunger Atlas. Over 800,000 individuals and about 400,000 households in Missouri struggle with food insecurity.

One of the many important services OATS Transit provides is transportation for essential shopping. This can be as simple as a trip to a local food pantry. Food pantries, also known as commodity sites, are where hungry families can receive food and other daily living essentials. OATS Transit provides a way for people all over the state to access food pantries in their area.

OATS Transit Regional Director, Dion Knipp, oversees OATS Transit service to food pantries throughout Central Missouri. He expressed the importance of these services for many Missourians. "Food pantries provide vital assistance to residents who suffer from hunger and food insecurity," said Knipp.

Crosslines, a Laclede county food pantry, is a USDA commodity site where qualified individuals and families can get food, clothing, household items and sometimes financial assistance. According to the 2018 Director's Report, they served over eighteen thousand individuals last year. Crosslines Executive Director, Viola Blankenship, has worked at the Pantry for the past 29 years. She interacts with a lot of people who say they don't have a way to get themselves to the Pantry. Blankenship suggests OATS Transit's services to those who need help. "I'm glad [OATS Transit] is in this community because we need it," Blankenship said. "There's some elderly and individuals with disabilities who may starve if they didn't have OATS to transport them back and forth."

For close to two decades, Kathy Mudloff has ridden OATS Transit. The bus takes her many places including the doctor's office and other places in her community. She also rides the OATS Transit bus to do her essential shopping. Mudloff receives assistance from Crosslines and a few other local pantries to supply her with the food that she needs to live. Because she doesn't have any other transportation options available to her, she relies on OATS Transit a few times a month to get food. "I like to cook," Mudloff said.



865,400
individuals
in Missouri
struggle with
food insecurity

Source: Feeding America



“OATS Transit is my only way to get to the food pantry so I can cook for myself,” Mudloff added. She is very thankful for the services and praises her drivers. Robin Ballhagen is one of those drivers.

Ballhagen drives in Laclede County and takes many of her riders to local pantries several times a month. She has come to understand the importance of these trips over the past seven years she’s been at OATS Transit. She knows that the pantries are a primary source of food for some. “Most of my riders don’t have family, so they rely on us to get to the food pantry,” Ballhagen said.

For more information on transportation to a food pantry in your area, visit www.oatstransit.org and click on the schedules tab, or give us a call at 888-875-6287. If your local food pantry isn’t on our schedule, let them know why our services are important to you, and why they should partner with OATS Transit, to get you and your friends or family to their facilities.

Pictured: Cover; Laclede County Driver, Robin Ballhagen picks rider Kathy Mudloff up after a trip to the L-Life Food Pantry in Lebanon. L-Life Food Pantry in Laclede County is operated by Shannon Reynolds. Reynolds says she is thankful for OATS Transit’s service that can bring riders to receive assistance from the pantry as it is their only way to get food. Top; Kathy Mudloff goes through the assembly line at L-Life Food Pantry and is able to choose what food she needs for the month. Bottom; An OATS Transit vehicle at The Food Bank for Central and Northeast Missouri in Columbia.



Donations are a **Lifeline** to Someone in Your Community



HELP YOUR NEIGHBORS HAVE ACCESS TO:

- ✓ FOOD & OTHER LIVING ESSENTIALS
- ✓ RELIABLE TRANSPORTATION TO WORK
- ✓ LIFE-SAVING MEDICAL APPOINTMENTS & TREATMENTS

VISIT WWW.OATSTRANSIT.ORG/DONATE

For the past 48 years, OATS Transit has been providing safe, caring & reliable transportation services to Missourians. Our drivers take residents to medical appointments, to work, day habilitation centers, shopping for essential goods, to senior centers, and to the places they need to go that allow them to continue to live independently in their own homes.

Siobhan Moray, pictured above with driver Larry Thomas, has been riding OATS Transit to work for the past two years. She describes herself as more mobile and more available with OATS Transit. "My boss says I've done so much better the last two years," Moray said. "I'm not constantly worrying how I'm going to get to work, and I'm more confident."

Your contribution may be deductible as a charitable donation on your income taxes.

Missouri Launches **Hearing Aid** Distribution Program

The Missouri Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing is excited to announce the inception of a new Hearing Aid Distribution Program for low-income Missourians. The program is accepting applications from individuals interested in obtaining hearing aids.



The Hearing Aid Distribution Program application is available at <http://mcdhh.mo.gov/hadp>. Interested applicants may direct questions to Kristin Funk, Hearing Healthcare Program Manager, at Kristin.Funk@mcdhh.mo.gov or by calling (573) 526-5205 / Toll Free 855-783-3177.

OATS Transit Staff Receive Honors

Congratulations to three OATS Transit staff members who received certifications this summer from the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA) at their annual conference in Palm Springs, CA. OATS Transit was one of the founding members of this national membership organization based in Washington D.C. CTAA members share innovations in public transportation, receive training and certifications specific to their needs, advance policy and legislative priorities and improve mobility options in their communities.

Finance Director Debbie Pilkington received the Certified Community Transit Manager (CCTM) honors. The CCTM designation marks the standard of excellence in the community transportation industry; as it is proof of the ability to manage a comprehensive and dynamic community transportation system.

Mid-MO Regional Director Dion Knipp became a Certified Transit Program Administrator (CTPA). The CTPA is designed for state agency personnel responsible for public and community transportation programs and was developed under the guidance of a select group of state agency employees, and is a cooperative venture of CTAA and the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials.

Southwest Area Manager Rene Frazier became a Passenger Assistance Safety and Sensitivity (PASS) Trainer. The Passenger Assistance Safety and Sensitivity (PASS) Trainer and Driver Certification program ensures that community transportation drivers have current expertise in passenger assistance techniques and sensitivity skills appropriate for serving persons with disabilities.

These individuals join 15 other members of OATS Transit's management team who are certified in a particular field. Each member must attend ongoing training classes to maintain certification in their field of expertise.

Pictured: (from left to right) Dion Knipp, Jack Heusted, Jill Stedem, Debbie Pilkington and Rene Frazier, at the CTAA Expo. Both Jack and Jill also hold CCTM certifications.



Sheree Webb Celebrates 40 Years with OATS Transit



Sheree Webb was honored by OATS Transit for 40 years of service in August. She started with the company in August 1979 and worked her way up to head the company's Northeast MO Region as Regional Director in 1991. She oversees operations in 16 counties, including Kirk-Tran in Kirksville, The Linc in Troy and the Magic City Express in Moberly.

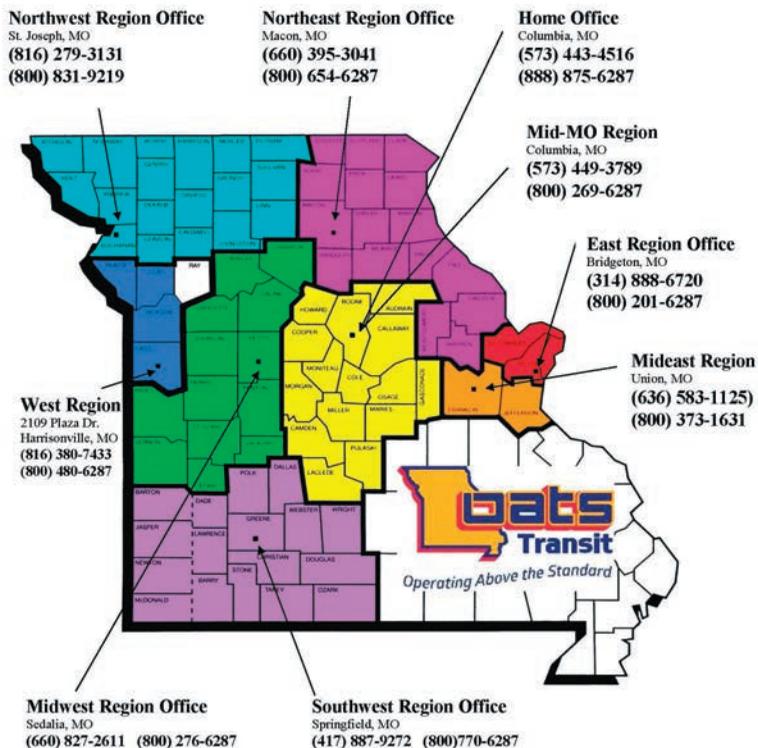
When asked about her 40 years at the company, Webb replied "OATS Transit is a great company to work for. Everyone pulls together to provide a valuable service to residents throughout Missouri, including the rural areas. I love being able to make a difference in the lives of others by providing them with the transportation they need to remain independent and living in their own communities," Webb said.

Pictured: Dorothy Yeager, Executive Director (left) and Sheree Webb, NE Regional Director (right) at a recent meeting in Columbia, MO where Sheree was honored.

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OATS Transit Service Area



Employee Anniversaries

The employees listed below celebrated an anniversary July-September 2019. Thank you to each of these employees for your hard work and dedication to OATS Transit!

40 years:

Sheree Webb-Northeast Regional Director

20 years:

Bonnie Allain-Midwest Op. Coordinator
Patty Robinson-Marion County Driver
Maggie Meltabarger-Cole County Driver

10 years:

Martin Schroeder-Franklin County Driver
Karl Osborn-Cass County Driver
Bill Green-Saline County Driver
Karen Luebbert-Northeast Op. Coordinator
Kathy Ervin-Warren County Driver

Congratulations!

Holiday Reminder: OATS Transit will be closed & most regular routes will not be running on November 28th or 29th for Thanksgiving as well as on December 25th for Christmas Day.