

The Wheel

**FEATURE STORY:
Overcoming
Barriers to
Employment**



Operating Above the Standard

April/May/June 2023 - Vol. 52, No. 2

The Wheel is published quarterly and mailed or emailed to riders, agencies, legislators and other interested parties.

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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, and Kansas City) service is limited to contract service and 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.

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 Transit representative or to schedule your trip.

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Bus schedules and fare information can be found at:

www.oatstransit.org/schedules
Phone: 888-875-6287
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Cover photo: OATS Transit bus in front of the Sedalia (MO) Tyson Meat Processing Plant.

Where's *The Wheel*?

With warm weather starting to peer around the corner in Missouri, we hope you are planning some new adventures. Why not take our magazine, *The Wheel*, with you?

Show us where you have been by taking a photo of you holding *The Wheel* at a location (anywhere in the world) and email the photo to Rhonda at rproctor@oatstransit.org. Don't forget to tell her who you are and where you are. If you get *The Wheel* digitally, just go to oatstransit.org on your cellphone and under the "More" tab, click on the latest issue of *The Wheel*. Then hold it up, smile and have someone take your photo.

We will be posting the photos on our social media platforms and in print. We love to show off our fans!



Have some fun with us. Find the answers to all of these questions in this volume of *The Wheel*.

1. What percentage of OATS Transit's overall organization is community employment services?
2. How much does OATS Transit have to raise for a local match in order to purchase a new bus for a community?
3. Who donated a new van to OATS Transit for the new in-town service in Troy, Missouri?
4. How many combined years of service have our incredible employees celebrated from January to March 2023?
5. How long has Stevie Buckner been riding the OATS Bus to work at Tyson Foods in Sedalia?

1. Community employment services makes up 13% of the overall organization's transportation services. (page 4).
 2. OATS Transit has to raise \$20,000 in local community match funds. (page 7).
 3. The Toyota Foundation and the local Troy Toyota plant donated a new van for our new in-town service in Troy, Missouri. (page 3)
 4. 115 years! We have 4 employees celebrating 15 years (3x15 employed with 10 years (20+10 = 30), 3 employees celebrating 5 years each (20), 1 employee with 5 years (75+40 = 115). (page 6)
 5. Stevie Buckner has been a rider for 11 years. (page 5).

Celebrating Firsts...

Monday, January 23, 2023, was the first day for the new in-town service running in Troy, Missouri thanks to a van donation received from the Toyota Foundation and the local Troy Toyota plant.

Shirley Dowell of Troy was excited to be the first rider with driver Tim Walsh. Shirley was able to go shopping thanks to the new van.

"Being able to enhance the lives of our riders by providing safe, caring and reliable transportation is at the core of our organization," said Dorothy Yeager, executive director for OATS Transit. "We share this same purpose with Toyota and look forward to helping more people in the community get to where they want to and need to go."



Northeast Driver Tim Walsh with Troy, Missouri resident Shirley Dowell.

... and Manys!

In late June 2003, OATS Transit received word that Care Cab, a transportation provider in St. Louis, was closing its doors. This would leave about 100 drivers out of work and several hundred people without transportation. OATS Transit was asked if we could take over those contracts to assure these St. Louis riders would not miss transportation services. We knew we couldn't do it without the support of the Care Cab drivers. We received a spirit of cooperation and a willingness to step in and assure "their riders" didn't have an interruption in service. About 50 of them took a leap of faith to join OATS Transit and agreed to continue their routes. Under the leadership of the East Region Director, Pam Knox, six of those employees remain



East Region group photo: Pam Knox (Regional Director) Ruby Bledsoe. In back is Kenny Mitchell & Felicia Wilson. Sitting is Jermaine Walker and Joe Wilson. All of these individuals have been here since 2003 and are celebrating a 20-year anniversary, except Felicia who left briefly and is celebrating 18 years.

with us twenty years later. We'd like to give a special thank you for their commitment and support to the St. Louis community!



New Buses in Southwest

OATS Transit's Southwest Region has received three new ADA-accessible minibuses thanks to federal grant funds awarded through the Ozark Transportation Organization (OTO).

The new buses were put into service in late March within the OTO area, which includes several southwest Missouri communities.

Feature Story:

OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT

Getting to work can be a difficult barrier for many people to overcome. In rural areas, people may have to commute to a nearby town or city for employment, and without reliable public transportation, workers must rely on their own vehicles to get to their jobs – assuming they can afford one, or on friends or relatives to get them to their place of employment. But what happens when your driver's license is suspended, or fuel costs rise to levels that make a family struggle between purchasing groceries or fuel?

OATS Transit helps fill this void as the largest rural transportation provider in the entire United States. The company specializes in services for the rural general public, individuals with disabilities, seniors, and Veterans. Transportation includes trips to work, medical and dialysis appointments, senior centers, essential shopping, business errands, and other contracted service. Community employment services make up 13% of the overall organization's service.

In 1994, Tyson Foods, Inc. began operation in Sedalia, Missouri and one of the challenges for their employment force was transportation to and from the plant. "Our relationship with

Tyson's began in the 1990s with a federal grant program that offered funding to companies to provide employment transportation," Midwest Regional Director Tracy Walkup says, "That federal grant no longer exists, but it has not changed our long-standing commitment to ensure employees can get to their jobs, safely and reliably."

For the past three and one-half years, Gary Nelson has gotten up at 2 a.m. to drive into the OATS Transit Midwest Regional Office in Sedalia, Missouri. "My first route starts at 3:40 a.m. and it's a pretty quiet group," Nelson laughingly says, "Most of them are asleep on the bus by the time we get to Tyson's plant. Hopefully, that's a good sign that they trust my driving!" Nelson's next route is at 5:15 a.m. and then a 6:30 a.m. shift.

Riding along with the 6:30 a.m. group is sure to make a person smile. Each rider gets on the bus with a smile and pretty soon, good-natured ribbing is heard, and laughter fills the bus. One rider questioned "where was Freddie?" and everyone shared the concern that Freddie's knee was really hurting him the previous day. Upon reaching Tyson's plant, each rider gets off the bus and hails fellow co-workers or waves to those still on the bus who will disembark at a different gate. Each worker will be picked up later in the day by Kenny Martin, the late shift route driver for OATS Transit to return them back home.

"While the routes can get a little monotonous," Nelson states, "I know how important it is to my riders to make sure that they get to work every day. The riders become part of the 'family'. I had surgery once and several of the riders reached out to make sure I was all right. That was pretty touching."

The OATS Transit bus can accommodate 12 employees at a time and reservations are highly encouraged due to seat availability. "I've



The Tyson Food Plant 6:30 a.m. shift all agree that the reliability and cost of utilizing the OATS Transit bus helps them overcome some of the barriers of getting to their place of employment.

been riding for 11 years," Stevie Buckner says, "It's reliable and I enjoy the service. One of our riders on this route has been riding for 18 years." All of the riders were in agreement that the reliability of the schedule

is an important consideration for them as the bus runs every day except for OATS holidays, inclement weather, and weekends. William Lucas adds to the conversation, by saying, "I would see the OATS Bus pull up at the plant and was teasing one of the riders that I was going to have to ride her bus one day. Then I found out that anyone could ride it, no matter the age. So, I gave the office a call and they have been really easy to work with. I even had to re-arrange where I was getting picked up one morning and it went smoothly."

The cost for the Tyson route is \$2.50 per one-way or \$5 daily. "You can't get a taxi for that in Sedalia," Linda Iliff says, "I had to take a taxi from where I live to the plant, and it cost me \$14 one-way. This is super affordable and costs me about \$100 a month which is easy for me to budget. It costs me about \$40 to fill up my car just once, so I get a better deal by riding the OATS bus." Several of the riders were shaking their head in agreement, including Kitsea Taylor who added, "I've actually gotten to know my fellow co-workers better through riding the bus. It's not really part of the overall Tyson plant benefits but I see it that way."

"This is super affordable and costs me about \$100 a month which is easy for me to budget."

- Linda Iliff, Rider

Riders on the bus have been working for Tyson for 3 months to 27 years. All live within the city limits of Sedalia as per the agreement with OATS Transit. "I'm riding the bus right now

because my car isn't working. Jamie Lucas says, "By riding, I'm actually finding out that I destress after work and before I get home. We are thinking about continuing to ride the bus even after our car gets fixed. My husband (William) works the same shift as me and it's been nice to visit with the rest of the riders on our bus."

If you or someone you know would like information on OATS Transit and our bus schedules, please visit the website at oatstransit.org, and follow us on [Facebook.com/oatstransit](https://www.facebook.com/oatstransit) for the latest news.



Stevie Buckner poses with the OATS Transit bus. Buckner has been using the service for years.



Midwest Driver Gary Nelson

Holiday Closures

The following are OATS Transit holidays and all OATS Transit offices state-wide are closed, including running of normal routes. These closures, along with reminders, are posted on our social media platforms.

- New Year's Day** (January 1)
- Martin Luther King Day** (3rd Monday in January)
- Presidents' Day** (3rd Monday in February)
- Memorial Day** (Last Monday in May)
- Independence Day** (July 4)
- Labor Day** (1st Monday in September)
- Thanksgiving Day** (4th Thursday in November)
- Day after Thanksgiving Day** (4th Friday in November)
- Christmas Day** (December 25)

Please note: If the holiday falls on a Saturday, the preceding Friday will be the day observed; if it falls on a Sunday, the following Monday will be observed.

Driver Shortages

While every effort is made to operate our vehicles according to their published schedules, there are times that we will have to cancel, adjust, or reschedule routes due to driver shortages.

We appreciate everyone's understanding as we have to make decisions that support our mission of enhancing the quality of life of our riders by ensuring safe, caring and reliable transportation.

If you know someone in your community who would make a great OATS Transit driver, encourage them to check out our job listings online at oatstransit.org/jobs.



Employee Anniversaries (Jan - March 2023)

40 Years



Paulette Waggle
Southwest Driver

"Paulette is a big part of OATS Transit history in southwest Missouri," Southwest Regional Director Jeff Robinson states, "It's simply amazing to think of the changes that Paulette has seen in her 40 year career. She is such a wonderful example of rural Missouri and the heart of the Ozarks. Paulette relates so well to her customers, demonstrating dedication and understanding unmatched by many. I commend her dedication to enhancing the quality of life of our riders by providing safe, caring, and reliable transportation services."

15 Years

- Michael Phillips** - East Ops Coordinator
- Renee Houston** - Northeast Ops Coordinator
- Frankie Hedges** - East Driver/Team Leader

10 Years

- Angie Pleasant** - Southwest Driver

5 Years

- Cortez Martinez** - West Driver
- Ron Roberts** - Mid-MO Driver
- Larry Klein** - Northeast Driver
- Rick Copeland** - Southwest Driver

Congratulations!
Thank you for your hard work.

Foundation & Businesses Providing Support

OATS Transit is pleased and grateful to be the recipient of donations given by Missouri businesses and foundations over the past few months.

To find out how you can support public transportation in your local community, call OATS Transit Development staff at 573-443-4516, or email jstedem@oatstransit.org.

Your support is important, so we can continue being there for individuals who need rides to medical appointments, work and so much more!

**Lebanon Area Foundation
Community CARES**
\$7,500 toward operating support in Laclede County.

**First State Community
Bank Golf Tournament**
\$1,000 to help offset fares in Laclede County.

**Franklin County
Area United Way**
\$13,750 for operating support in Franklin County.

WE NEED YOUR HELP!

We need your help to raise local bus match funding. We have 700 vehicles statewide that run cumulatively 11 million miles per year, which means continuous vehicle replacement. The local match we have to raise at today's cost is now \$20,000 for each new vehicle. That means we can't buy new buses in your community unless we have the local funds.

Can you tell us about local churches, civic clubs or college groups in your town that we can talk to? We will do the work; we just need contact information to reach out to them about doing a fundraiser or donating funds to help us with the local match. Email jstedem@oatstransit.org and we will take it from there.



APRIL IS VOLUNTEER RECOGNITION MONTH

National Volunteer Month is celebrated in the month of April every year. Although we appreciate those who donate their time and talents every day of the year, we do want to praise them during this special month.

In 1971, OATS Transit's history began through the work of 100 volunteers in Mid-MO who saw the need for affordable rural public transportation. We would not be here today without their efforts.

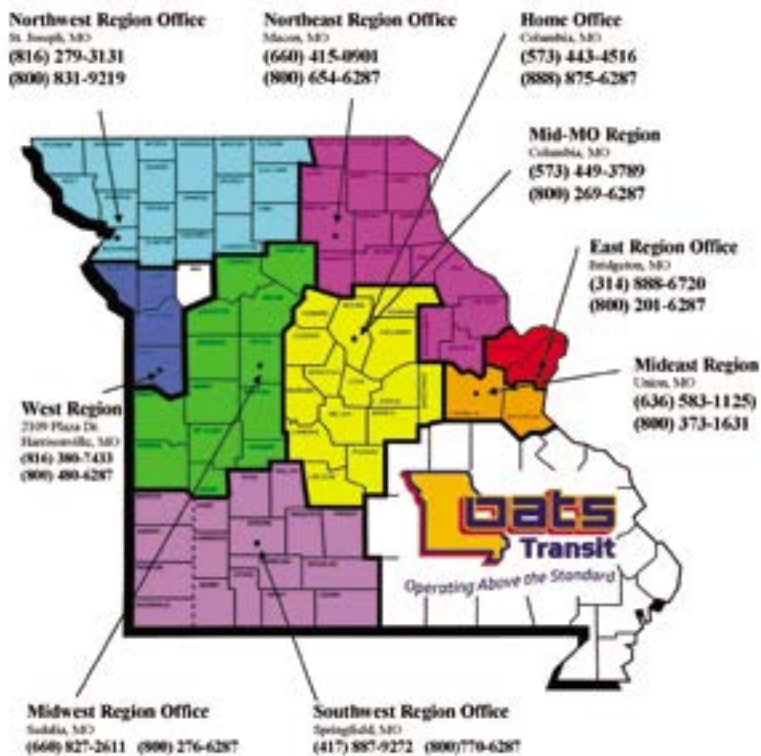
If you are interested in volunteering for our organization, you can find a list of ways to help us at oatstransit.org/volunteer.



A group of volunteers visited Washington, D.C. in 1971, to advocate for rural public transportation.

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Upcoming HOLIDAY:

OATS Transit offices will be closed and regular routes will not be running on Monday, May 30th for the Memorial Day Holiday.

