FEATURE STORY:
WHAT IS A NONPROFIT TRANSIT ORGANIZATION?
The Wheel is published quarterly and mailed or emailed to riders, agencies, legislators and other interested parties.

Editor: Rhonda Stone Proctor  
Phone: 573-443-4516 or 888-875-6287  
Email: rproctor@oatstransit.org

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.

OATS Transit Board of Directors  
President: Scott Kosky  
Vice President: Darleen Rapp  
Secretary/Treasurer: Tammy Nadler  
Past President: Krissy Sinor

Members: Angie Crowder, John Griesheimer, Jeff Leeman, Patricia Mefford, Essence Montgomery, Julie Rodgers, Rex Scott, Stacey Steffens, Mel Sundermeyer, and Andrew Warlen.

Board Meetings are held six times a year and are open to the public.

Bus schedules and fare information can be found at:  
www.oatstransit.org/schedules  
Phone: 888-875-6287  
Follow us on social media:  
@oatstransit

Cover photo credits: Several OATS Transit staff got the opportunity to ride on the KC Streetcar. They learned about the expansion project, which will extend the streetcar another three miles by 2025.

2023 Missouri Transit Operator Champions

Several Missouri transit operators were recently presented with a 2023 Missouri Transit Operator Champions award by the Missouri Public Transit Association (MPTA). The honorees were recognized during the 2023 Midwest Transit Conference for Region 7 held in Kansas City on September 6-8.

“Transit operators work tirelessly to provide a vital service to their customers who rely on transit to get them where they need to go,” said Kimberly Cella, executive director of the Missouri Public Transit Association. “Those named as 2023 Missouri Transit Operator Champions go above and beyond to assist their riders, but their efforts often go unnoticed by those outside of their community. We are proud to highlight their dedication and willingness to go the extra mile through this award.” The transit operators honored at the event were nominated by their individual transit provider employers. All operators were recognized for going above and beyond the call of duty to serve their communities and care for their riders.

OATS Transit is proud of our eight honorees:

Ty Baxter  
Southwest Driver

Dwayne Bisch  
Mideast Driver

Roxana Heidbrier  
Northeast Driver

Winton Kelley  
West Driver

Maggie Meltabarger  
Mid-MO Driver/Team Leader

Josh Spear  
Midwest Driver/Team Leader

Carolyn Toney  
Northwest Driver

Jermaine Walker  
East Driver

Congratulations!
Several staff members from OATS Transit attended the Missouri Public Transit Association’s annual conference and training in Kansas City in early September. This yearly Region 7 Transit conference brings together transit organizations from Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa and Missouri. OATS Transit staff attended training on building partnership with local agencies, navigating through post-pandemic obstacles, and meeting with vendors on new products associated with the transit community.

Our organization was honored to receive the Award of Excellence from the Federal Transit Administration’s Region VII for the Highest Rural Public Transportation Ridership Among Transit Systems in Missouri in 2021. This award is usually presented yearly but was suspended due to the pandemic.

OATS Transit hosted staff from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) at our Northwest regional office on September 6, 2023.

As the largest public rural transportation in the nation, we are proud to be able to show how our organization is able to provide our unique services. Special thank you to the employees of the St. Joseph office for facilitating the visit and assisting with the tour.

OATS Transit employees representing Missouri Transit were (left to right): Mideast Regional Director Michael Burbank, Director of Operations Dion Knipp, Mideast Operations Manager Megan Ellert, Mid-Mo Regional Director Gary Anspach, Fleet Manager Mike Altemueller, OATS Transit’s Executive Director Dorothy Yeager, Northeast Regional Director Sheree Webb, Administrative Director Jill Stedem and Mideast Operations Manager Kevin Porter. (Not pictured are East Regional Director Pam Knox, Midwest Operations Manager Dawn Ashurst, Southwest Operations Manager Rene Frazier, East Operations Manager Chris Reichers).

Our Northwest Regional office was toured by representatives from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). Pictured (left to right) are FTA Region 7 Deputy Administrator Mark Bechtel, OATS Transit’s Northwest Regional Director Beth Langley, FTA Region 7 Transportation Program Specialist Logan Daniels, OATS Transit’s Executive Director Dorothy Yeager, FTA Deputy Director Veronica Vanterpool, OATS Transit’s Director of Operations Dion Knipp, and FTA Region 7 Administrator Mohktee Ahmad.

Reminder

With the upcoming winter season, please remember to listen to your local radio & television stations regarding office closings and route cancellations.
ATS Transit has been in business since 1971 and serves 87 of the 114 counties in Missouri. The organization is the largest rural public transportation system in the United States. OATS Transit provides more than one million trips annually, covering 11 million miles.

Our service is a shared-ride, public transportation offering services to people of all ages and abilities. OATS Transit operates weekdays, Monday - Friday, with some routes operating on weekends and after-hours. Hours of service vary depending on the county and local funding sources. Many of our riders rely on our services to get to medical appointments, grocery shopping, and work. We also offer intercity express routes to connect people with larger cities. Our buses are all accessible.

OATS Transit is a unique transit organization as we are a 501(c)(3) nonprofit entity. Funding for operations comes from several different revenue streams and we have to meet several state and federal thresholds.

But what exactly is a 501(c)(3)? According to Internal Revenue Service, a nonprofit organization is an entity that is tax-exempt and operates to better the community. Though nonprofits often have the most passionate individuals and diversified donation streams, nonprofits also often have limited resources for hiring and regulatory requirements.

Last year our operating budget was just over $25 million to serve 87 counties in the state. Revenue to provide our transportation comes from many sources including federal grant programs, special contract agreements, and others such as the state Medicaid program, rider fares, and the Department of Mental Health.

When funding or donations come into OATS Transit, they are usually restricted use, meaning that they
have to be used for what they are intended for. For example, if funds come in with a notation that they are to be used for Audrain County services, they are “restricted” for operations.

While rider fares only make up 2% of our revenue they are still very important to our bottom line. It costs on average $50 per hour to provide service across the state of Missouri. That means a small donation of $50 could provide one hour of service for an OATS bus anywhere within our service area.

Unfortunately, our organization does not receive many donations from local entities such as county or city governments. When local fundraising is not enough to support our local operating costs, we have to make some tough decisions. It is very important to our organization that we try to keep our services in each of our 87 counties at the same level or even grow them, but we rely on donations to do so.

We need local match dollars to pair with other grants we receive. As a donor you can designate whether you want the funds to go to program cost or buy a new bus; it’s your choice! Your gift will help provide transportation to those in need in your own community.

To find out more about OATS Transit and our unique rural transportation services, or to donate, visit oatstransit.org or follow our social media platforms on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter or LinkedIn.
Few groups deserve our recognition, respect, and gratitude more than the brave men and women who have served in the military. These individuals and their families have made huge sacrifices so we can preserve our way of life. This Veterans Day, we would like to extend our sincere thanks and appreciation to veterans who have served so selflessly and courageously.

No matter where you live or how much time you have to dedicate, there are a multitude of ways to honor a veteran — whether a loved one or stranger — who has spent their life protecting our values and democracy.

1. Say “Thank you!”
If you know a veteran, whether they live close by or states away, make an effort to simply say “thank you!” If your schedule is hectic and you don’t have time for an in-person visit, a quick phone call or text is sure to be appreciated.

2. Write an old-fashioned letter or send a care package
Looking for something a little more personal than a text or email? Send a veteran a handwritten letter or care package with a small gift and some of their favorite snacks. This is an especially considerate option because they can treasure your letter or gift for years to come!

3. Treat a veteran to a meal
Inviting a veteran to a popular local restaurant or cozy coffeehouse is guaranteed to make their day. Prepare a few questions to ask about their time in the military. Being able to share their story may even be more meaningful than being treated to a meal.

4. Support veteran-owned companies or certified Hire Our Heroes employers.
The Census Bureau estimates that nearly 5.7 percent of all U.S. businesses are veteran-owned. Find a veteran-owned company near you and visit them today. You can also support organizations that have gone through the Hire Our Heroes certifications, like OATS Transit. We take pride in that our work team is 14% veterans.

5. Offer to help with household chores
If you have even an hour to spare, offer to help a veteran with household tasks such as vacuuming, laundry, or mowing the yard. This small act of gratitude speaks volumes.

6. Make a commitment to volunteer
The internet makes it easy to find meaningful volunteer opportunities. Search the Veterans & Military Families category on VolunteerMatch.com to find a hospital, charity, or other organization that needs help near you.

7. Invite a veteran to speak at your child’s school
Many children don’t fully understand the sacrifices veterans have made to protect us and our freedoms, but you can do something to change that. Ask your child’s principal if they accept visiting speakers. If they do, invite a veteran to talk about their experiences or host a Q&A session at your child’s school.

8. Attend your local Veterans Day parade
Bring the whole family to your city’s Veterans Day parade and show your support in person. Check with your local VA office for details about Veterans Day events and celebrations in your area.

9. Make a pledge to remember their legacy
Honoring veterans can come in many forms. Fly an American flag in front of your home, wear a red poppy or have a moment of silence and reflection. Anything you can do to pay your respects is a meaningful way to observe Veterans Day.
OATS Transit is pleased and grateful to be the recipient of donations given by Missouri businesses and foundations over the past few months. Your support is important, so we can continue being there for individuals who need rides to medical appointments, work and so much more!
To find out how you can support public transportation in your local community, call OATS Transit’s Development staff at 573-443-4516, or email jstedem@oatstransit.org.

Community Foundation Serving West Central IL & NE MO
$7,500 toward operating funds for Clark & Knox Counties, MO

Jason Ash Memorial Foundation
(not pictured)
$500 toward operating funds for Miller County.

MO Dept of Economic Development ARPA Funds
(not pictured)
$25,000 toward operating funds for all regions.

Thank you for your support!

Employee Anniversaries - July, August & September 2023

25 Years
Dwayne Bisch
Mideast Driver
Ruby Bledsoe
East Driver
Lisa Durbin
Northwest Driver
Ken Mitchell
East Driver
Jermaine Walker
East Driver

20 Years
Ian Cardiff
East Driver

15 Years
Randy Ford, Northwest Driver
Tommy Henderson, Mideast Driver
Gloria Miller, Northwest Driver
Sean McConnell, Midwest Driver

10 Years
John Fields, Corporate Safety Manager
Kevin Porter, Mideast Operations Manager
Ed Schmaltz, Mideast Driver
Cindy Stark, Northeast Driver
Trever White, Northeast Operations Manager

5 Years
Ed Ames, Midwest Driver
Max Christman, Southwest Driver
Mike Garrison, Midwest Driver
Dion Knipp, Operations Director
Orlando Lewis, East Driver
Ruusel Lynch, Midwest Driver
William Miller, Northeast Driver
Daniel Repple, Mideast Operations Coordinator
Larry Wilson, Northeast Driver
Barry Zurick, Mideast Driver/Team Leader
Upcoming HOLIDAYS:

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.

Thanksgiving Day - November 23  
Day after Thanksgiving - November 24  
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.