



# The Wheel

A publication of OATS Transit  
October/November/December 2023 - Vol. 52, No. 4

**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.

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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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*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](http://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



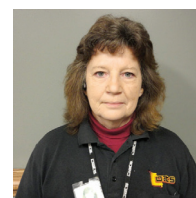
**Dwayne Bisch**  
Mideast Driver



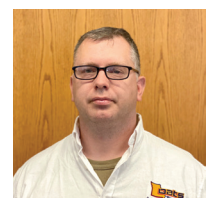
**Roxana Heidbrier**  
Northeast Driver



**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!*

# OATS Transit Receives Award of Excellence

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 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).

*Operating Above  
The Standard*

# FTA Tours Northwest Regional Office

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.



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.

# Feature Story:

# WHAT IS A NON-PROFIT TRANSIT ORGANIZATION?

**O**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



Three Rivers' Helping Hands Community Foundation assisted OATS Transit with helping with matching funds to purchase a bus.

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.

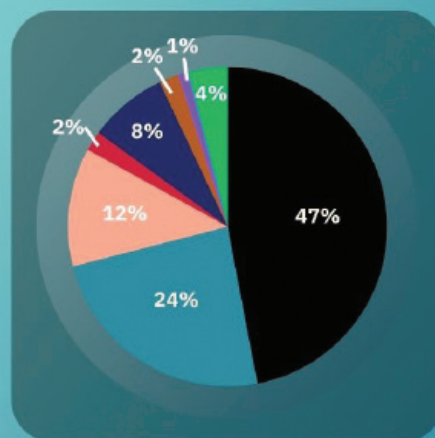
Last year our operating budget was just over \$25 million to serve 87 counties in the state. Revenue to provide our transportation comes from many sources including federal grant programs, special contract agreements, and others such as the state Medicaid program, rider fares, and the Department of Mental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

When funding or donations come into OATS Transit, they are usually restricted use, meaning that they

## Funding Sources

FY22

- Federal Funding
- Special Billings
- Medicaid
- Rider fares & Contributions
- Dept. of Mental Health
- Area Agencies on Aging
- State Funding
- Other



OATS Transit receives funding through several sources. FY22 funding sources are indicated above.

# Ways to Support OATS Transit



The Veterans United Foundation supported OATS Transit through a donation that allows all Veterans in Boone County, Missouri to ride free.

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](http://oatstransit.org) or follow our social media platforms on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter or LinkedIn.



- 1 Call us at 888-875-6287 and request to make a donation.
- 2 Visit [oatstransit.org/donate](http://oatstransit.org/donate) and click on the donate button.
- 3 Host a fundraiser for OATS Transit.
- 4 Tell us about community grants or funding opportunities for us to apply.
- 5 Choose us as a recipient for Giving Tuesday by donating. #GivingTuesday is Tuesday, November 28, 2023.
- 6 Talk to your local city council, county commissioners, or state representatives about local funding for OATS Transit.
- 7 Engage positively with the organization through our social media posts. This raises awareness of our organization and services.
- 8 Email the organization a testimonial and photos that we can use to tell others about our services.
- 9 Start a Facebook fundraiser for the organization. This is free to you and declaring OATS Transit as the recipient of the fundraiser helps us provide services.
- 10 Follow us on our social media platforms and share our content to your personal page.
- 11 Leave a positive review on our Google Business page.
- 12 Come work for us! We have several positions open throughout our service area. #BePartOfTheTeam

# Salute to Our Heroes

**F**ew 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

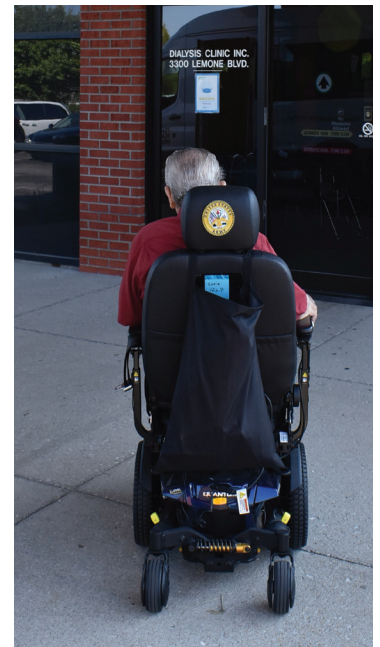
Many children don’t fully understand the sacrifices veterans have made to protect us and our freedoms, but you can do something to change that. Ask your child’s principal if they accept visiting speakers. If they do, invite a veteran to talk about their experiences or host a Q&A session at your child’s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



*Ken Burgan, U.S. Army Veteran and OATS Transit Rider.*

# 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. 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](mailto:jstedem@oatstransit.org).

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



Photo: Lance Grady, Board Chairman for the Community Foundation Serving West Central Illinois & Northeast Missouri presented the check to Jill Stedem, Administrative Director for OATS Transit.

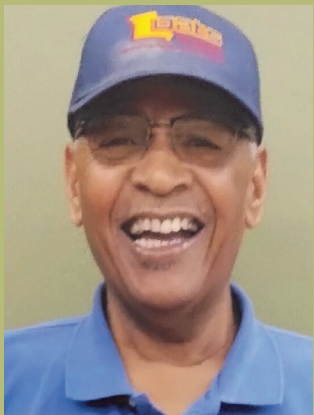
**Jason Ash Memorial Foundation**  
*(not pictured)*  
\$500 toward operating funds  
for Miller County.

**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

### 20 Years



**Ruby Bledsoe**  
East Driver



**Ian Cardiff**  
East Driver



**Lisa Durbin**  
Northwest Driver



**Ken Mitchell**  
East Driver



**Jermaine Walker**  
East Driver



**Joseph Wilson**  
East Driver

### 15 Years

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

### 10 Years

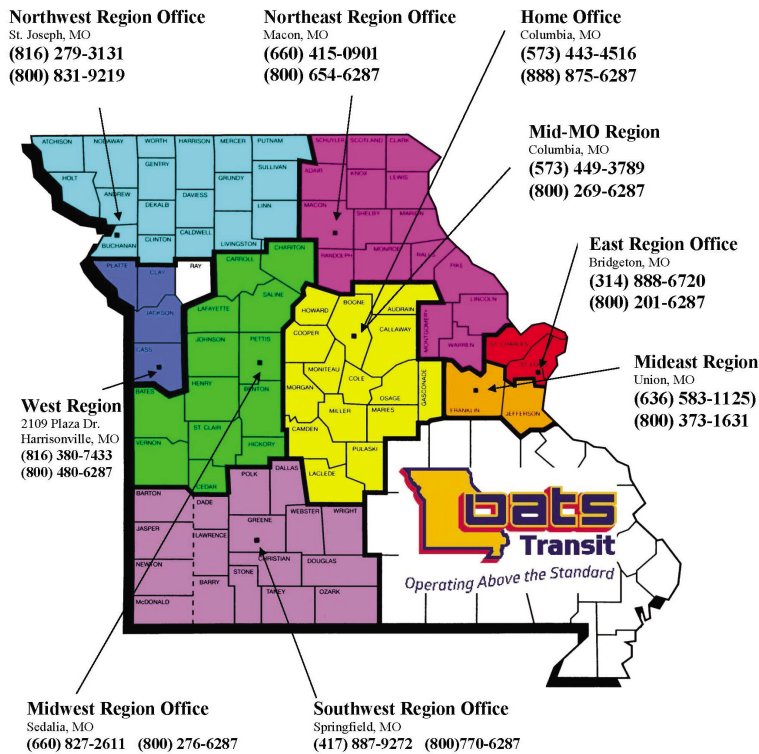
John Fields, Corporate Safety Manager  
Kevin Porter, Mideast Operations Manager  
Ed Schmaltz, Mideast Driver  
Cindy Stark, Northeast Driver  
Trevor White, Northeast Operations Manager

### 5 Years

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

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## 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.*