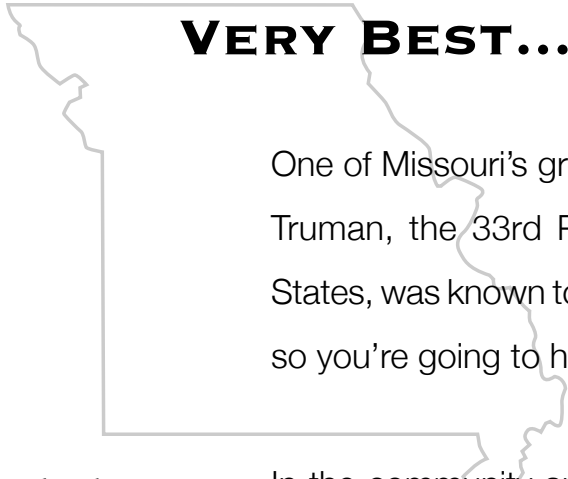


SHOW *Me*:
COMMUNITY AND PUBLIC
TRANSPORTATION AT ITS
VERY BEST...



One of Missouri's greatest citizens, Harry S. Truman, the 33rd President of the United States, was known to say, "I'm from Missouri, so you're going to have to show me."

*By Beth Wilson,
Rich Sampson and
Scott Bogren*

In the community and public transportation field, Missouri has a lot to show. Across the *Show Me State*, we found some of the most innovative examples of outstanding community and public transportation. We visited systems serving their communities, their small towns and their cities with effective, efficient, flexible and reliable mobility services. We met wonderful people, dynamic leaders — all with extraordinary vision and values. These are their stories.

From the remarkable light-rail system serving the entire St. Louis region to the station wagon connecting riders in Lamar, Missouri is home to far more than one might expect when it comes to transportation at its very best. It certainly showed us.

SHOW *Me*:

21ST CENTURY TRANSPORTATION

OATS Southwest • Springfield, Missouri

One can scarcely discuss community and public transportation in Missouri without eventually coming to OATS, the volunteer-led transit system that brought you quilt raffles, annual letter-writing campaigns, commemorative brick paving and bus processions around the state capitol. Designed by community, steered by volunteers, fueled by partnerships, economies of scale and creative promotion, OATS has been connecting Missourians for over three decades.

OATS is also a model for the 21st Century transit operation — one that has constantly reinvented itself to better serve its passengers and communities; one that has been unafraid to take risks, break barriers and be proactive. With noteworthy leaders like Peter Schauer in the beginning, and Linda Yaeger, CCTM, today, the system has thrived through the years, and it has done so because the focus on passengers is the one thing at OATS that hasn't changed. The riders have always come first at OATS, for it was they who conceived of this system more than 30 years ago.

When the Missouri Office on Aging set out in 1971 to study mobility issues for the state's rural elderly, resident Quinnie Benton wanted to save researchers the time. She and several other seniors in the mid-Missouri area already knew the data first-hand. Their communities didn't need a study; they needed transportation. Directing the 60,000 research dollars to a start-up transportation cooperative, eight Missouri counties put three 15-passenger vans on the road using dollars raised from sold shares and community commitment. The Cooperative Transportation Service transformed in 1973 into a private,

not-for-profit corporation called Older Adults Transportation Service — OATS.

A strong sense of community ownership grew alongside the evolving service, and by 1978 OATS was serving seniors in three-quarters of Missouri's rural areas and small towns, with service defined by volunteer County Support Committees and rides coordinated through local passenger contacts. When the network extended service to the general public in 1980, the OATS name was too renowned to lose. Today, the seven regional service



Scott Kosky, CCTM, maps out change to better serve Southwest Missouri.

OATS's Springfield staff makes the connections possible.





SHOW ME: 21ST CENTURY TRANSPORTATION

areas — each with their own County Committees and designated volunteer coordinators — carry the OATS legacy forward.

OATS Southwest serves a 17-county region that borders Arkansas and Kansas. The system is based in Springfield, and serves the city with door-to-door service that complements Springfield's City Utilities fixed-route and demand-response service for people with disabilities, and Southwest Missouri State University's campus system for students and faculty. But OATS Southwest's reach extends far beyond the Springfield city limits with an extensive variety of routes and services in surrounding communities throughout the area, offering connections to medical care, shopping, recreation and jobs — connections to life.

One of this region's greatest challenges is geography. The area is rural, with significant distances between some passengers and the services they need. The southernmost counties lie in hilly terrain interrupted by lakes.

"You can see a house across a cove, but it's 80 miles to get there," explains Scott Kosky, OATS Southwest's manager for the past two decades.

Drivers live in the region they're serving, so they're generally well-versed in the local geography. Still, someone can be hard to find, in which case the driver will stop at the post office, fire house or police station for directions. I rode vehicle number 1191 with driver Janet Chapin from Mountain Grove, Missouri.

Chapin celebrated her 25th year with OATS last November. A framed black and white photo on the Mountain Grove Community Center wall shows a younger Chapin, circa 1980, striking a familiar pose — aboard her OATS vehicle.

Chapin moved to Wright County and became a mother, a master gardener and active community member. After working with the elderly at an area nursing home, she felt her acquired skills might be an asset in community transportation. Nine years later, she applied for a position with OATS as relief driver.

"I'm not sure anyone thought I would last that long," she says with a grin.

Chapin is not just behind the wheel. She's inside medical facilities, nursing homes, schools and the local Y, reaching out, educating, coordinating, communicating. The local community, she says is very supportive — from the city council to local businesses to individuals. That support is crucial as service areas work to raise the local investment for replacement vehicles. In Chapin's Mountain Grove region, they've raised money from volunteer bake sales, and received financial support from stores and banks.

But behind the wheel is where Chapin says she does her most important work.

"I like the involvement with my riders," she says,

describing her door-to-door service, helping passengers on and off the bus, even helping them with groceries. "I'm doing something that's worthwhile."

One of her oldest passengers passed away about a year ago.

"That was hard. You lose a part of yourself when people die," says Chapin.

Community transportation operations like OATS offer more than mere trips, they offer connections to life, unlocking doors and maintaining people's independence. A trip to the hair stylist or social event can be just as vital as a medical trip.

Chapin has all kinds of riders: the gentleman who likes to go out for breakfast; young riders studying to earn their GED, seniors, people with disabilities going where they want to go. She takes passengers once a month to Springfield. Tuesday and Thursday are big Mountain Grove days. Friday she's connecting the rest of the county with Mountain Grove.

Some look at systems like OATS as providers of mobility to those with no other way to go. And while the system certainly offers an alternative to those without any, many riders make the connection as a matter of choice.

Venita appreciated the ride a couple of weeks ago. An overnight freeze left their vehicles stuck in the driveway.

"I just called up Janet. 'Can you take me to work?'" recalls Venita. "Whenever it gets icy, a lot of people choose the bus."

Chapin steers her OATS vehicle to pick up Melissa. When she doesn't appear at her door, Chapin knows she's probably over at Karen's. So Chapin heads over to Karen's home, and there they both are, ready to make their afternoon appointments at Rehabilitative Services. Neither is sure that this time slot works best for them, so Chapin runs in to check out other possibilities for the women.

"We need a lot more like Janet," says Karen. "Put in a good word for OATS! I found out about OATS when I was going to the hospital. They told me, 'You can sign up at the Community Center.' So I did. And it's great."

Melissa read about OATS in the newspaper, and first tried taking a trip to Springfield. Now, she says, OATS takes her lots of places.

The defining characteristic of the OATS network — the community, passengers and volunteers — is the vital source of investment for the system. And this investment is best characterized by the higher commitment the passengers and communities have offered OATS. Beyond rider on-board donations and the number of hours contributed to County Committees and ride coordination, volunteer fundraising ensures OATS' bus match for much-needed replacement ve-

SHOW *Me*: 21ST CENTURY TRANSPORTATION

hicles. Bake sales, chilli suppers, walk-a-thons ... you name it. And in addition to scheduled money-making events, community members promote the system with elected officials and business leaders throughout the year, garnering city and county financial contributions for operations or checks from the business community for vehicle replacement.

OATS service has always been a flexible one, ready to meet the community's needs and rider demand. In the Southwest region, where many communities face double-digit unemployment OATS, as usual, stepped up. Connecting workers with opportunities is now a crucial role for OATS here. In partnership with the Stone County Economic Development, the Stone County Community Action Corporation, the Division of Family Services and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, OATS Southwest operates a 26-mile fixed-route service from Galena to Branson West. With local, county and federal support, Kosky was able to launch a new employment transportation initiative known as Way-2-Go.

"We're putting a lot of little things together to make it work," he says.

It began with a large collection of agencies coming

together. Now, employees are connected to jobs in the Silver Dollar City theme park and surrounding hotels, restaurants and retail stores.

"All kinds of destinations are tied into the route," says Kosky. "It's our kind of creativity."

Discovering, encouraging and blending support and investment in new ways, in old ways, in all ways. People call him the Great Experimenter.

In addition to traditional federal transit financing, OATS Southwest — like all the regional OATS providers — enters into contracts with various state and regional agencies like the Missouri Department of Mental Health, Missouri Elderly and Handicap Transportation Program, Southwest Missouri Office on Aging, as well as with local entities like St. Johns Hospital, sheltered workshops in Springfield, Lamar and Monett. Medicaid-funded trips are assigned to each regional OATS provider through MTM, a Medicaid transportation broker.

Kosky says that although OATS continues to serve a large number of senior residents — with seniors being OATS' *raison d'être* in the beginning — the system has caught on with the general public. Even with lots of younger people. Part of that change, he explains, came

Veteran driver Janet Chapin (r) knows where she can find her regular passengers, including Melissa and Karen of Mountain Grove.





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with a change in vehicles — vehicles that look like “a real bus.” Just another example of the system changing to meet the needs of its customers.

“There’s a balance we have to strike. The social good generated on the bus is a great strength of OATS,” says Kosky, explaining the tight-knit camaraderie that often develops among regulars. “On the other hand, we have to be aware of maintaining an open, welcoming attitude toward new folks.”

That welcome comes through loud and clear when Dorothy Buff answers her phone. As the volunteer coordinator in the Ozark/Spokane/Highlandville area of Christian County, Dorothy schedules rides on driver Lynette Stafford’s Vehicle No. 1059 for Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays and the second Monday of every month.

Every town in OATS Southwest service area has a Dorothy — a local neighbor waiting to take their ride request.

“No long-distance phone calls necessary!” says Kosky, describing a community-based system supported by 180 volunteers.

As one might imagine, the leadership style at OATS matches the service — flexible and accommodating.

The magnet stuck on Kosky’s in box reads *We’ve never done it that way before!* encircled and crossed out in red.

“I always say, the day I say we don’t do it that way is the day I retire,” he says. “The right way is all ways.”

As an example, Lawrence County — due west of Springfield — has been experiencing a lot of change, becoming more urbanized, attracting a lot of new residents. OATS Southwest experimented and moved the scheduling operation to the regional office in Springfield, using a toll-free telephone number.

“That lends a bit of professionalism that people new to the area would expect,” explains Kosky, of a process they guessed might feel more comfortable. “As a result, ridership has increased.”

One of the biggest challenges in transit, says Kosky, is, “to keep yourself fresh. To be aware of what challenges there are, and also what opportunities there are. Challenges can become opportunities real quick.” He pulls out a Missouri state map with the southwest region marked by overlapping orange circles.

“Each one of these circles represents 25 miles out from a hub,” he says, explaining natural hub tracking. “We’re looking to see where we can provide the best service from each of these places.”

Kosky points out alternatives plotted around one hub, talking about how much each one might change things. Ah, change. Be open to it, Kosky advises.

That task is made easier by the experience, insight and support offered by the other six regional OATS offices and the home office in Columbia.

“It’s great to work for an organization that gives you latitude to look at your own world,” says Kosky of OATS’ structure. “Linda Yaeger, our Executive Director, always says, ‘Get with the community and bring the ideas. Then plow forward.’ That would never happen with a hierarchical mindset. We’re a team.”

A team coached by more than 1,200 volunteers in 87 counties across 51,000 square miles.

“The OATS network is a great resource. I can just pick up the phone. Being able to bounce ideas off of people is a real advantage,” says Kosky. “My world is different from the Mid-Mo world, which is different from the Northeast world, etc. You look and find needs specific to your world, and you go out and hunt down the kind of people that can fill those needs.”

In the OATS Southwest World, that has meant cross-community cooperation and networking. For example, OATS’ relationship with one hospital in Joplin created an opportunity to work with another, which created an opportunity to work with another, which had a relationship with two nursing homes. In another example, a Community Action Corporation in one region called OATS because they heard about their relationship with a CAC in another region. Kosky attends regional planning commission meetings, getting to know decision makers and ensuring that they know him. OATS Southwest coordinates with four city-operated systems in Lamar, Carthage, Mt. Vernon and Marshfield.

“We’re not real territorial down here,” says Kosky.

And part of staying true to the mission is the simplicity with which OATS communicates its real value to the community. One such method couldn’t be more simple — or more effective. Riders are given business cards to hand out at the register of stores they’re shopping in thanks to an OATS ride. The cards read:

I am here today thanks to OATS. I rely on the OATS bus to go to my medical appointments and for essential shopping. The purpose of this card is to let local businesses know that without OATS, I — and many others — would not be able to be your customer. Please support OATS public transportation!

Typically, on the back, passengers will note the amount of money spent in that store. A nice way to make sure local businesses recognize, in dollars and cents, what mobility means to their bottom line.

And what does OATS mean to its passengers? As the commercial says: priceless.

“We wake up every morning and do work that touches people,” sums up Kosky. “I’m proud that we’ve never lost track of our reason for being here, why we got started. We have never gone adrift. We’re here. We’re serving people in the way they need, as we promised three decades ago that we’d do. We have stayed true to our mission.”

SHOW *Me*:

A DIFFERENT KIND OF COORDINATION

Truman Area Transportation Service • Lamar, Missouri

In far southwestern Missouri, 30 miles from the Kansas border, the town of Lamar is known for being the birthplace of one of the state's most famous — and favorite — citizens: Harry S. Truman. It's also known as one of the state's — and nation's — finest examples of innovative coordination and resourcefulness in community-based transportation.

Indeed, the pursuit of coordination and of innovative partnerships in helping to build community and public transportation services has taken many forms over the years. But in Lamar and its Truman Area Transportation Service, that pursuit takes one directly to the Chief of Police Ron Hager, who also heads up the town's transportation system.

For Chief Hager, the transition had its confusing moments. Before the Truman Area Transportation Service expanded its staff, the Chief filled in where he was needed, using his unmarked police car to provide rides. Many residents got used to the vehicle, and even after it went back into full-time police business, the Chief would sometimes return to the car and find passengers, groceries in hand, waiting for a ride.

These days, residents of Lamar, Missouri, know to look for the familiar Truman Area Transportation logo — mimicking a road that leads to places — on the station wagon and lift-equipped van navigating the community of 4,500. Housed in the Lamar Police Department, the system shares radio equipment and personnel. Chief Hager is the Director of Services. Police Department Secretary Ginnie Keatts is the Office Coordinator. Add five drivers and a decade of experience, and this small team delivers an average 100 rides a day.

Nowhere in Missouri is the flexible and innovative spirit of community transportation — values steeped in the national community transportation network — more visible than in this service running a small bus and a good old-fashioned station wagon out of the police department. Like so many community transportation

Law and Door-to-Door: Keatts (l) and Hager bring public safety and public transportation to Lamar.



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systems around the country, well, it just works.

Keatts says her two positions blend well. She uses the same computer and the same phone for police and transit. In the beginning, transit shared a radio frequency with the police, fire and ambulance, but growth in ride demand and delivery required a devoted frequency. Now if one listens closely to the dialogue on the transit frequency, it sounds more like Dragnet than the typical transit vocabulary. On board a Truman Area Transportation vehicle you'll likely hear dispatch requesting 10-16s (pick ups), or, when ride demand is especially high, letting drivers know, "No time for 10-6s (stand by) today!"

The lexicon might be atypical for community transportation, but the commitment of everyone at Truman Area Transportation to the people of Lamar — and the community's gratitude for the service — is another example of the *finest kind of public service* one sees in this field.

"Everybody in town has a scanner," says Keatts. "We're the entertainment. I'll run into someone in town and they'll ask, "Were you a little stressed yesterday, Ginnie?"

Drivers have mastered the talk, but as a back up driver Janet Sitton keeps a codes cheat sheet on her clip board. Sitton used to work at the courthouse. She volunteered for a while at the library, then decided she wanted to try something different. After answering an ad in the newspaper, she's been behind the wheel for the system for the last six years. She's lived in Lamar for 40.

"Every time I move, it's within a two-mile radius," she says of her longevity in the area. "I know every road." A familiarity with both town and residents that makes community transportation special.

Sitton connects a lot of regulars, and she knows her passengers well. Like the romantic newlyweds in their 90s, or the woman who sings every Tuesday night at the

Driver Janet Sitton (r) uses the ride to catch up on news with passenger Betty.



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senior housing complex. If a passenger is going home, she usually knows where that is. If someone is headed to their daughter's house, she knows that locale, too.

"For some, this is the only outside contact they have," notes Sitton.

A 10-16 request comes over the radio. Passenger Doralee is ready to be picked up at the hair stylist. Sitton doesn't have to clarify which one. She knows who goes where to have what done.

"I got a spot for you right behind me!" calls out Sitton as she pulls the station wagon up to the salon.

"I'll take it!" replies Doralee, masterly coifed.

As Sitton makes a requested stop for her at the drive-through pharmacy, Doralee talks about her family and history in Lamar. She started riding in 2002 after her third heart attack.

"I'm sure glad we've got TATS (as the locals call it) — and Janet," says Doralee.

Celebrating its 10th anniversary last September, Truman Area Transportation is often affectionately known around town as the cab. The moniker doesn't bother Chief Hager, because he knows how vital a role the system is serving. Annual City surveys continuously ranked transportation near the top of residents' needs.

The Lamar service idea was hatched in a conversation with Hager's colleague in nearby Carthage, where the partnership of police and transit in Missouri was pioneered.

"I was hesitant, but the Carthage chief told me, 'It's the most rewarding thing you'll ever do,'" recalls Chief Hager.

And so, as is inevitably the case with community transportation, Chief Hager and Keatts simply went out and did it. They got a vehicle. They found some drivers. They set up shop.

They began with an ad in the newspaper and a few flyers around town, but quickly realized that they didn't need to advertise. Calls poured in.

"After a couple of weeks, our drivers were so busy they barely had any time to get out of the vehicle," remembers Hager.

Seniors and people with disabilities make up a significant portion of Truman Area Transportation's ridership, and trips to meal sites are exceeding only by shopping trips. Vital non-emergency medical transportation is provided countywide.

"I know we have people in town that would have been in a nursing home a long time ago," says Hager, underscoring transit's role in independence and access. "And they are so appreciative."

Community-based services like Lamar's connect local residents with the panoply of destinations that ensure their passenger's quality of life. From the life — and independence-saving medical trips to a simple

shopping outing, Truman Area Transportation — like others across Missouri and across the country — helps local residents lead better lives.

To be able to connect residents 11 hours a day, Monday through Friday, Hager and Keatts pull together a \$90,000 budget from a variety of investment sources. In addition to fares and riders' contributions, funding continues to come from the Missouri Department of Transportation, the Area Agency on Aging and Lamar Schools. Lamar Community Betterment provides matching funds for dollars from Missouri Elderly and Handicapped Transportation Assistance Program, as does Barton County Memorial Hospital, which supplies additional funding to offset medical trips.

Like many community transportation systems, Truman Area Transportation is facing the challenges of rising fuel and insurance costs. Yet these challenges and any others never move the system off its focus on passengers and service.

"I couldn't think of another business that affects people more with the amount of money we spend," says Chief Hager.

That's the message delivered every August at Lamar's annual town fair — the largest in Missouri. Carnival rides, livestock shows, parades, car shows, dances and the annual Lamar Queen contest. The town population can nearly triple to 12,000 on the town square. This is where Truman Area Transportation does some important outreach and fundraising. Their bags of peanuts are popular sellers.

"It let's everyone participate in their transit system," says Hager of the not insignificant dollars and awareness raised.

In addition to this positive image among local residents, Chief Hager and Keatts site a strong relationship with the Lamar City Council, some of whose members themselves use the system.

"They understand the need," says Hager. "They have a lot of trust in us."

This afternoon Driver CaSandra Crowl has one of her regulars on board. Tim has already connected to work earlier today, and now he's out shopping. Terry is a newer passenger. He boards after his first day of work for a local manufacturer of building materials. Terry lives with his grandmother, a Truman Area Transportation regular who told him about the transit service. Connections to work ensued, and the system has another grateful rider. As the bus pulls up in front of home, he lets Crowl know that he'll need a 7:30 a.m. pick up to make it to work on time.

"We'll see you then," Crowl responds.

Lamar's largest employers understand transit's value. O'Sullivan Industries, manufacturer of ready-to-assemble furniture, employs over 1,400 people. Thorco Industries, manufacturer of display fixtures, employs

SHOW *Me*: A DIFFERENT KIND OF COORDINATION

almost 500 people. Both companies provided investment for the system's first vehicle. Finley Engineering has been another important business supporter, providing original seed money for the service. One of Truman Area Transportation's regular passengers, Barney, had been part of the firm. After he died, Finley continued to invest in the system.

"Barney was very independent, and with transit he stayed independent," says Hager.

Barney's family still sends a check every Christmas.

"Then we find somebody else. But I always let them know, 'I might be back.'"

As is the case with many community and public transportation operations, Truman Area Transportation's drivers are an invaluable asset to the system. All of the drivers are retired residents. Most of them, she says, view the job as a service to the community.

"We have drivers with good hearts," says Hager. "We tell drivers, the things you're going to do are not traditional. Some of these people see our drivers more than their own family!"

Keatts says that dispatch and drivers have to sometimes expedite these extras covertly.

"There's one woman — we can't use her name because she always listens to the scanner!"

The connections are more than just rides.

"Our drivers are the gateway for many back to the community. They know their passengers. And they'll request well-being checks by the police," says Keatts. "We'll get a call here asking, 'Did you guys take so-and-so somewhere today? I can't reach them?'"

The most challenging aspect of the job, says Sitton, is when an elderly passenger dies.

"I miss them," she says. "They've lived full lives, and they share them with me."

She pulls the station wagon into a shopping store's parking lot, and

Betty is waiting. She's finished her shopping, and it's time to go home.

"I'm going to see Aunt Ellen tomorrow night," Betty informs Sitton.

Ellen had been a regular on the bus until she had to go to a local nursing home.

"Oh, tell her I said, 'Hi!'" says Sitton. "She was always so much fun. I miss her."

"That's the thing about living in a small town," adds Sitton. "You know who's been married to who, who's in the hospital."

Another thing about a small town: community transportation can make a difference in people's lives. In Lamar, Missouri, the Truman Area Transportation Service may be unique in that it runs out of the local police station, but the value of its service to local residents and the resourcefulness of its coordination are community transportation at its very best. Great people, great work. And that would be, as they say in Lamar, a 10-4.



Whether its a medical appointment or a hair appointment, passenger Doralee can count on TATS.

"They tell us, 'Barney couldn't have ever gotten out without you,'" says Keatts.

A municipal airport just a half mile west of Lamar sees a fair amount of business travel, with a number of contacts flying in to do business. And the City is currently building a runway to accommodate larger aircraft. Truman Area Transportation, along a route, often picks up salesmen and takes them to O'Sullivans. They can deplane and walk over to the blue and white sign that reads, "Need a ride?"

"Transportation makes businesses want to stay here," says Hager.

"Any business is town — you go by and there's our number displayed," adds Keatts.

These important connections to local business and industry don't just happen. It takes the diligence of Chief Hager and Keatts, speaking up for those in the community who need mobility choices, to succeed.

"We go to businesses for three or four years," explains Hager, describing outreach to the private sector.

SHOW *Me*: URBAN TRANSIT SERVICE, COMMUNITY TRANSPORTATION-STYLE

JEFFTRAN • Jefferson City, MO

Among Missouri's many fine community and public transportation operations, JEFFTRAN, in the state capital of Jefferson City, stands out as an operation in transition. As the city's population has steadily risen in recent years, the transit system has grown to match demand. A rural system has become an urban one. But the values that helped JEFFTRAN succeed continue.

The Missouri River cuts diagonally across Jefferson City. Most of the community pulses on the south bank of the river. State workers pour into downtown office buildings everyday, bringing with them congestion and a need for mobility choices.

Richard Turner, JEFFTRAN's Transit Division Director, has been with the system for 15 years. In those years, he has seen first-hand the transit system's

transition from the City's Department of Public Works, to being part of the Department of Community Development. He has also seen ridership rise by seven percent.

The system began as a shuttle system for state employees headed to downtown office buildings and the state penitentiary. Economic development has scattered factories and retail around the area. Employment and shopping destinations are spread out. In short, Jefferson City is undergoing the type of change seen in many American communities, and JEFFTRAN is transitioning to meet the city's new mobility challenges.

JEFFTRAN operates 24 vehicles along 11 routes. All routes run into downtown's Capitol complex, which essentially serves as the system's transfer center. Regu-

JEFFTRAN serves Missouri's state capital of Jefferson City.



SHOW ME: URBAN TRANSIT, COMMUNITY TRANSPORTATION-STYLE

larly scheduled bus routes connect the state employee parking lot to the capitol complex Monday through Friday — including stops at Missouri Department of Transportation, the Jefferson Building and the Truman Building.

The system operates a complimentary curb-to-curb service for people with disabilities known as Handi-Wheels. Ridership on Handi-Wheels has grown rapidly, providing another clue to JEFFTRAN's future.

"We used to take five-to-10 people a day," says Turner of Handi-Wheels. "Now we're making 225 trips a day."

Examining the system's service, its routes and the best way to serve Jefferson City is an ongoing commitment at JEFFTRAN. A lot of routes have been in place for a long time, says Turner, and as JEFFTRAN reinvents itself during this period of transition, it's reevaluating operations.

Two major hospitals and two dialysis treatment centers in Jefferson City have fueled migration to the city, explains Turner. Many of those people need, or eventually need, transit.

Like so many other community transportation professionals, Turner came down the transit path by

Turner. "I really liked it."

And from there he launched a career, getting to know the system through work in dispatch, followed by operations. He eventually took on the role of Operations Supervisor before leading the organization. Like so many other community and public transportation leaders, Turner brings to this vital job a thorough understanding of how the system functions — and thus how it can best change to continue to serve Jefferson City. In many ways, Turner's transition mirrors that of JEFFTRAN.

He's got a lot on his mind this morning. The system is working through the funding transition, moving from rural to small urban. The City is currently doing all it can to maintain the system during these growing pains. Insurance and fuel costs have gone up.

"It's a constant battle," he says of winning investment for transit. "But we know how important this service is. And we're going to convince our local leaders of the same."

Turner is hopeful. There's been recent change in City leadership. New, young council members open to change and fresh ideas.

"They might say yes to a lot of things that previous politicians wouldn't," explains Turner. "This is a good time for us."

One such new idea is a partnership with Lincoln University, with 3,500 students who need to get around town and campus and to evening jobs. Turner is also working with Scholastic Books, a major Jefferson City employer which has requested regular service.

"Our strongest advocates are a number of business people who now have aging parents," says Turner. "They don't have to leave work to care for them," says Turner of the impact transit has not only on passengers but on passengers' families. "We've got JEFFTRAN right here. And people have realized there's a need."

Looking ahead, Turner has designs on a new transfer facility. A building that previously housed an over-the-road operator is now empty. The City owns the building, and Turner sees its potential

for JEFFTRAN.

The staff at JEFFTRAN are strong advocates themselves. Walter is an operations assistant and has been with JEFFTRAN for 25 years. He started out as a driver, and today he does a little of everything — training, dispatching, driving.



JEFFTRAN's urban transit service has a distinctly community feel.

destiny, not design. He was a car salesman for a number of years. He knew someone working at JEFFTRAN who suggested he look into options with the transit system.

"At first I just worked four hours a day or so. I just came in to work with the computers in the beginning. And I ended up working 50-plus-hour weeks!" recounts

SHOW *Me*: URBAN TRANSIT SERVICE, COMMUNITY TRANSPORTATION-STYLE

“The equipment we have now is a lot better. We’ve come up with better ways of doing things. And we’re reaching different types of people,” he says, considering two and a half decades. “JEFFTRAN is a life line, really.”

A ride along one of JEFFTRAN’s buses reveals that lifeline and the need for transportation, as well as the outstanding service the system is providing. If the measure of success in community and public transportation is its ability to impact people’s lives, to connect them with all the things that improve one’s quality of life and to do so in a cost-effective, efficient and friendly manner, well, JEFFTRAN would find itself at the top of the list. Take, for example, a trip with JEFFTRAN driver Jim Hoerner.

Sisters Glenda and Krikette can see all the action from the last row of the bus. They seem to know most passengers by name. There are a lot of regulars on Hoerner’s bus. A lot of passengers, for that matter. The bus is nearly full, with riders boarding and departing at nearly every stop. It looks like an urban bus system, but it feels like a rural service.

Krikette and Glenda not only know every JEFFTRAN route; they know all the system’s drivers. They claim to have their favorites but then change their minds and debate the merits of each other’s selection. Today they’re on board not to go anyplace in particular but to find a particular person — JEFFTRAN driver Tammy, who they expect to find on the next bus they try today.

As Hoerner maneuvers along the city streets, someone asks about Shirley, who’s been in the hospital with pneumonia. The Hoerner bus crew made sure she received a card signed by all her co-passengers.

“I called Shirley last night. She was getting out today,” Hoerner lets his busload know. Turning to me, he notes: “We’re like a family. If somebody’s missing, we all know it.”

Sally is seated near the front of the vehicle, and lets Hoerner know that she’ll be transferring later in



Walter (r) and a JEFFTRAN colleague.

the route.

“You got it,” says Hoerner. “You want to take a snooze? I’ll wake you up.”

Sally leans her head back, closes her eyes and let’s Hoerner handle the logistics.

This bus is headed out to the mall past the senior center, and a seeming thousand stores, shops and services of all kinds. Meanwhile Hoerner is espousing the virtues of dish versus cable with passenger Dan. Next, Hoerner and Dan talk about a mutual acquaintance just diagnosed with kidney problems; he’ll be starting dialysis, and they know he’ll be needing transportation.

Dan used to drive until his car accident over a decade ago. He carries a folded copy of the newspaper article in his billfold — a grainy newsprint photo of a two-story house with the back end of a car sticking out of the second floor. Dan survived but says the medical experts weren’t sure he’d ever walk again. With no small amount of difficulty, he did. He makes transit part of his on-going physical therapy. Dan rides about three hours a day, always in the first seat by the bus door. He sits sideways and holds onto the metal pole with both hands. He says the back and forth motion of the bus enables him to strengthen his muscles.

Mark boards with others by the Capitol.

“Hey, Buddy!” says Hoerner.

Mark is beside himself. Obviously, finding Hoerner

SHOW *Me*: URBAN TRANSIT, COMMUNITY TRANSPORTATION-STYLE

behind the wheel has made his day. Mark lets him know that he needs to go home, and Hoerner quickly phones Mark's house to leave a message for his mother.

"I told her you'd meet her at the mall, buddy."

Often these days, commentators bemoan the lack of community in modern American life, the absence of a connection with one's neighbors. To take a ride on a JEFFTRAN bus here in Jefferson City, the opposite conclusion is immediately drawn. People are talking

Wayne and Tony jump off with Mark, and just as quickly their back on board with cold drinks. They've obviously done this before, and have the timing down.

As the bus passes the JEFFTRAN garage, Mark lets out a whoop, pumping his fist in the air. That's his garage! JEFFTRAN is his system! Mark is an award-winning athlete, competing every year in the Special Olympics. Bowling is his game. A photo of him with teammates adorns Hoerner's farebox. This is a close-knit bunch.

Clearly, JEFFTRAN's riders are connecting to the system. Rider after rider refers to it as "my bus" or "my ride" emphasizing how much they value the service and the connections it enables. But it's more than just the destination. For many, it's the ride itself that matters.

JEFFTRAN Driver Jason has been behind the wheel for a little over a year, usually driving for Handi-Wheels, JEFFTRAN's demand-response system for people with disabilities. He was previously a children's pastor for three years, but discovered that wasn't his calling.

"If they paid me anything I wanted, and said you can do anything you want, I'd still pick this," he muses.

Community and public transportation systems around the country are constantly transitioning. Perhaps it's the nature of moving people and building communities. JEFFTRAN, with its dedicated staff, expanding ridership and growing local support, is successfully serving Missouri's capital and building a positive reputation for community and public transportation throughout the state.



with each other about the things that are important in their lives. They're connecting. And to think, it's a transit system that's making it all possible.

Hoerner reminds Mark that *Cops* is on television tonight at 9:00 p.m. It's Mark's favorite show, and he gets excited all over again. Then there's a short exchange of hand signals.

Mark has a job with Scholastic, where he loads and unloads trucks shipping books all bound for schools, libraries and children all around the country.

We pass apartment buildings and the Senior Center. A grandmother and granddaughter, who've been out shopping, exit the bus, with a smile for Hoerner.

As the bus pulls up in front of a superstore, Hoerner lets passengers know he'll pause momentarily if someone wants to buy a soda from the machines in front of the building. He passes quarters back to Mark.

Richard Turner: "This is a good time for us."



SHOW *Me*:

INNOVATION IN URBAN TRANSPORTATION

MetroLink • St. Louis, Missouri

Stretching out from a city best known for its rugged determination and enterprising spirit, the MetroLink light-rail system of St. Louis is filled with the same flair for adventure and pedigree of accomplishment. Much like the lofty expressions of the city through its symbolic Gateway Arch or Charles Lindberg's famous Spirit of St. Louis, MetroLink melds dependable service with unique attributes that have led it to become a crucial element of the region's transportation network.

Spanning nearly 40 miles in four counties in two states, MetroLink light-rail trains reach from the Scott Air Force Base located deep in St. Louis' Illinois suburbs in Shiloh, across the mighty Mississippi River, under the heart of downtown, through one of the largest public parks in the nation, to Lambert Airport in the west. Along the way, they call at 36 stations in vibrant communities and important destinations to move thousands of passengers per year. Not only that, by virtue its opening in July 1993, it became the pioneering light-rail service west of the Mississippi and east of California, crafting a legacy befitting the same adventurous spirit of St. Louis, where so many great expeditions of adventurers and fortune-seekers first began their journeys.

Not only did MetroLink set out boldly by offering St. Louisans their first taste of a modern rail system, in doing so, it utilized a path of historic bridges, abandoned tunnels and the periphery of cemeteries to build its route. Planners with the Bi-State Regional Transit Authority, which oversaw the design, construction and



operation of the system, took advantage of underutilized infrastructure throughout the region to lay-out the line that would eventually become the present-day MetroLink. Fusing these unique rights-of-way into the structure of the light-rail route not only served as an important cost-saving measure, but it allowed for better located stations and reduced travel times over a newly constructed right-of-way. These design features proved to be substantial amenities for the service to attract riders and enhance mobility options throughout the area.

MetroLink also connects at numerous points with the system's extensive bus operation, enabling intermodal connections across the region.

MetroLink has navigated its trail to success through



SHOW *Me*: INNOVATION IN URBAN TRANSPORTATION

its ability to be a unifying resource for the entire region — in much the same way that community transportation operations have done. While it certainly fills the important role of delivering commuters from outlying areas to the downtown core, and others making the reverse-commute as well, it also has allowed area travelers to access Lambert Airport, partake in the many cultural and recreational assets at the city's Forest Park (and the site of this year's National Community Transportation Roadeo), reach educational opportunities at the University of Missouri-St. Louis and Southwestern Illinois College in Belleville, attend the games of the city's three major-league sports teams or enjoy the attractions and activity of downtown St. Louis. These uses, and scores of other roles played by MetroLink, are the very touchstones of a vital light-rail service.



Just as the city's history is marked by the continual pursuit of progress, MetroLink, too, will continue to expand its system in the years ahead. Already underway is the eight-mile extension south from the Forest Park station to Shrewsbury. Known as the Cross-County Extension, the branch will reach new nine communities, such as Richmond Heights, Brentwood, and Maplewood by 2006. Still on the drawing board are plans to connect to the Mid-America Regional Airport in St. Clair County, and a series of new lines to the north, south and west.

As we've witnessed across the state of Missouri, responsive and robust community transportation can take on widely differing formats and characteristics. But the hallmarks of good services always incorporate the same fundamental elements such as determination, ingenuity and achievement. MetroLink trains have been built upon, and maintained their vitality through steadfast dedication to these principles. Surely, a city that so strongly embodies these traits can take pride in the rail service it has fostered in MetroLink.

THE PIONEER

Peter Schauer has an interesting way of describing Missouri's geographic position in the United States. "We are the most eastern point of the West — and the most western point of the East."

Peter should know something about geography — and community and public transportation. He has visited every state in a transit career now spanning three decades, helping transit systems and managers to take new and innovative looks at their operations, their marketing and their image. For Peter, it's always been about serving passengers and communities — having fun, enjoying life and the process, too.

It began in 1973. Peter was just out of The Pennsylvania State University and was the new general manager of a recently created corporation that provided transit service to the elderly and disabled. In 1974, when he spoke before the United States Senate's Special Committee on Aging, the Older Adults Transportation Service, Inc. — OATS — had 10,000 members, and volunteer county committees were organizing routes and schedules for a multi-county demand-response operation designed to meet the growing transportation need of seniors and people with disabilities.

"I had been at OATS for, what, six months? Three months?" guesses Peter today. "I was an expert! Nobody knew where we were going."



Peter Schauer is ready for the bus (and next winter).

Perhaps, yet Peter did have an astute sense of direction for the fledgling OATS system that was consistent with the many other community transportation systems being launched in the 1970s. See demand — meet demand, one might call it. It's a mantra Peter finds relevant today.

"There was so much to do then," he says. "There's still so much to do."

Peter was working on his MA when he took on the transportation project. He was offered the job of directing the operation at less pay than he was making

SHOW *Me*:

CONNECTING WORKERS WITH JOBS

Workforce Investment Board of Southeast Missouri • Cape Girardeau, Missouri

The Workforce Investment Board of Southeast Missouri is using funds from the Job Access and Reverse Commute grant program and a match of U.S. Department of Labor Workforce Investment Act (WIA) dollars to provide transportation services in rural southeastern Missouri. This service area, initially covering seven of the most impoverished counties in the state when it began in 1999, has expanded to serve all thirteen counties of Southeast Missouri.

Missouri Goes To Work creates opportunities for

residents to go to work at sites they normally would not be able to access.

It's another example of the variety of successful transportation programs in the Show-Me State, a coordinated approach to helping Missourians find and keep employment. And it's working.

Workforce Investment Board staff work with area transportation providers — including Southeast Missouri Transportation Services, Cape Girardeau County Transit Authority, Dunklin County Transit, Stoddard

as a research assistant at the University of Missouri. His boss offered to make up the salary difference with part-time work.

"And I said, 'But it's only temporary, right?'" says Peter, smiling. Fast forward 30 years to a remarkable career in community and public transportation. In 2002, Peter was honored with the Community Transportation Association of America's Founder's Award, recognizing his pioneering efforts on behalf of transit systems and riders everywhere.

"I'm a lucky guy," says Peter.

He's also someone who doesn't throw anything away. On his farm in Boonville, Missouri — about 150 miles

Peter Schauer, his wife and associate Lynne, and Peter Schauer's Associates' Director of Security, Tansy.



due west of St. Louis — Peter houses his numerous transit-oriented collections. Spend any time there, and one is likely to find themselves rummaging through box after box of community transportation history. It's a role Peter takes on willingly, and, thankfully, he has a barn he can devote to his collections. Inside the barn is a milieu of transit history — paraphernalia from many a transit conference adorn the walls and ceiling.

It all stems from an early fascination Peter had for anything with wheels. Perhaps his career in community and public transit is not too surprising.

"I just like to move people," says Peter.

He has another collection on the farm, too — one that at first glance might seem to have little relevance to transit. But it's this compilation, more than the posters, books, testimony, ties, etc., that reveals the real Peter Schauer.

A piece of rock or stone from every project he's worked on in his transit career.

Something solid like this gives him a sense of place, and each rock brings back memories of people and communities served, of innovative ideas and shared dreams.

"Place is important," says Peter, understatedly.

Peter's place in community and public transportation is well-known and secure. The stories of success at his beloved OATS, and all of the other systems around Missouri — and across the nation — are, in many ways, testament to his pioneering spirit to serve.

SHOW *Me*: CONNECTING WORKERS WITH JOBS

County Transit, Mississippi County Transit, Scott County Transit and more — to set up routes to selected employment sites. Workforce Investment Board staff target employment opportunities for one-stop customers that meet strict criteria: Jobs are an average of \$8.00 per hour (a “living wage” for the area), workers receive benefits, and working conditions are safe. They assist customers in obtaining positions and guarantee those who meet income guidelines with a way to reach these targeted employers through Missouri Goes To Work.

The Workforce Investment Board oversees the entire operation of Missouri Goes To Work, including working with the transportation providers, supporting agencies and the riders. It contracts to provide transportation services with transit providers that carry individuals from central locations convenient to their homes to employment sites. The service is available 24 hours a day to accommodate all work shifts and, to date, there are 20 routes serving the 13 counties.

One of the most important measures of success for Southeast Missouri’s Workforce Investment Board, comes from one of their partners, Workforce, Inc., a staffing company.

“We used to have our own vans,” says a Workforce manager. “But we’re not transportation experts so we’re concentrating on what we do best and leaving the transportation to the Workforce Investment Board and Missouri Goes to Work.”

The Workforce Investment Board uses a system of fares for individual riders, ranging between \$2.00 and

\$5.00 a day. These fares are based on how many miles a rider travel. Staff also determines the fare on a sliding scale fee based on an employee’s salary. Trips for new workers are free until they receive their first paycheck. Thereafter, the employee contributes part of their pay to their transportation.

“By paying for a portion of their travel, the riders buy into the service they are provided,” explains Missouri Goes To Work Program Manager June O’Dell. “This translates into a responsibility to be at the pick-up point each day. Building in this financial incentive works really well.”

Many local agencies use the system to serve their clients. Among them are the Center for Independent Living, the probation and parole office, the Career Assistance Program, and Family Services. Regardless of who buys the ride, each and every rider receives a uniform ticket to ride. According to O’Dell, this ensures that all riders are viewed the same and no stigma is attached any rider.

As with so many other successful Missouri transportation systems, the impetus to launch the Workforce Investment Board transportation program in the Southeast part of the state came from those centrally involved: dislocated workers, employment programs and employers. It was only after these groups established the need that this innovative program evolved.

In addition to the 20 operating van routes, Missouri Goes To Work staff facilitates carpooling for smaller groups of workers living in outlying areas. In these

carpools, one person with a reliable vehicle agrees to pick up two or three people. The Workforce Investment Board pays the driver for this service and the riders also pay for part of their rides. O’Dell adds that the carpool option works best for short-term travel needs, such as an eight-week class or training.

When the program started back in 1999, Workforce Investment Board staff undertook an intensive outreach program to find the riders for the transportation services. That outreach program was unique in that job developers and other partners set up outreach booths in public housing communities, church basements and anywhere else

The Workforce Investment Board connects hundreds of people a day with employment.



where the targeted populations spend their time. This outreach allowed individuals without transportation to come in and apply for jobs and register for transportation services.

Today, Workforce Investment Board staff uses job fairs and flyers, instead of the intensive outreach program. As Manager O'Dell explains, "References from case managers, employers and other riders fill the vehicles for nearly every route, and, there are even waiting lists for some routes."

Workforce Investment Board staff and board members do, however, promote Missouri Goes To Work, its services and successes to the community-at-large, communicating that this program is taking people to locations they could not otherwise have gone and that it is creating a new opportunity for job development and economic development.

Using an array of federal and state funds and working with their partners, Missouri Goes To Work has been able to provide more than 80,000 one-way trips. In 2004 alone, 4,000 people took advantage of the transportation program, allowing individuals who have never worked to go to work and enabled some to go off of public assistance. Currently, about 160 people a day are using the service, and vans take riders to approximately three dozen employers.

Because of the transportation options available to them, many long-term, low-income individuals now enjoy not only good jobs, but work with benefits, vacation, and an income to support their family.

"People who had very little hope for the future, now have an opportunity to work, and even advance in their jobs," elaborates O'Dell who adds, "Missouri Goes To Work helps employees to maintain their jobs. The effect that the program has had on the lives of residents is truly amazing."

The transportation program has also given employers an opportunity to tap into the area labor pool that would not otherwise be available to them. Some employers have been receiving employees via federal and state transportation programs since its inception. Other

employers have benefited from Missouri Goes To Work more recently. A major employer operating in two different Southeast Missouri counties currently employs approximately 100 Missouri Goes To Work riders and continually gives the Workforce Investment Board orders for new positions. The transportation program certainly has benefited the local economy.

"We have 60, maybe 90 job openings that could



June O'Dell (c) and Missouri Goes to Work partners: Without transportation, people lose their jobs.

be filled tomorrow if we had transportation," says an official with Workforce, Inc.

The next step for Missouri Goes To Work is sustaining and even growing ridership. Even though transit providers do collect ridership fares, the trips are not all self-sustaining. As the program progresses, staff will continue to look for ways to expand services while streamlining those that already exist. In addition, Workforce Investment Board staff are actively looking for funds to support the program after federal employment transportation investment runs out.

O'Dell emphasizes that the Workforce Investment Board of Southeast Missouri is always open to new, more effective approaches to providing transportation.

"Transportation affects so many people in our programs. I think of how dependent we've become on our transit component. The two largest barriers in this area are child care and transportation, and this takes care of one of them. Without it, people would lose their jobs," says O'Dell.



SHARING THE GOOD NEWS: MISSOURI'S STATEWIDE RURAL PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION MARKETING INITIATIVE

The residents of Missouri — all across the state — are fortunate to have one of the most expansive, innovative community and public transportation networks in the nation. In late 2003, the staff at the Missouri Department of Transportation's (MoDOT) Public Transportation Division decided to develop a statewide public transportation marketing campaign to promote the state's outstanding network of rural transit systems.

Steve Billings, Administrator of Transit for the Missouri Department of Transportation says, "Nothing like that had been done for our rural systems and we thought it would be an innovative effort."

MoDOT worked with the rural systems to identify the desired campaign elements — a multi-media advertising campaign and a speaker's program to aid fund-raising efforts.

To aid in the effort, Selena Barlow of Transit Marketing LLC was brought on by MoDOT. Throughout 2004, Selena and her team worked closely with the Missouri rural public transportation providers. Workshops were held to determine exactly what marketing tools would be most useful and what messages needed to be conveyed. The workshops resulted

in development of the campaign theme and creation of a statewide identity, summed up by experience.

A significant aspect of the campaign sought to highlight the qualities that make rural transit successful: inclusiveness, responsiveness, freedom, quality of life and access to opportunity. It was determined that these benefits could best be communicated by the riders themselves, so the campaign would use the real words of passengers.

In June 2004, Barlow, Shirley Tarwater, the Department of Transportation's rural transit administrator, and a video crew spent a full week touring Missouri, interviewing, video-taping and photographing transit riders and providers in a dozen communities. Rural systems recruited the participants, provided vehicles and allowed their riders to tell their stories. The week resulted in eight hours of video tape that provided the basis for development of the campaign.

The most important product of this project was a Marketing Toolkit that went to every one of the state's 31 rural public transportation providers. The kit included a 10-minute speaker's video with supporting handout materials; a fully produced ad campaign for televi-

sion, radio and print; customizable templates and digital files for creating local promotional materials that coordinated with the statewide effort; and vehicle decals that tied the rural providers together as a statewide network. Providers also participated in a full-day training session on how to use each of the marketing tools most effectively.

The campaign was launched in early 2005. Since then, the video has been shown widely to help educate legislators and local community leaders. Tarwater notes that response has been extremely positive so far.

The campaign and its results to date were discussed at a workshop during the Community Transportation EXPO in St. Louis.

SHOW *Me*: OUR VALUES

Southeast Missouri Transportation Service, Inc. • Fredericktown, Missouri

Southeast Missouri Transportation Service is one of the nation's oldest rural public transportation systems, and one whose creation came as many have since, not at the behest of a government funding program but in response to a very real need in the community.

A number of local volunteer groups in Southeast Missouri recognized that transportation was the solution for most problems they were addressing, and they approached the Missouri Department of Community Development in the early 1970s searching for better mobility strategies. A nonprofit corporation set up shop and started serving elderly and disabled residents in 1973 with three vans.

Today, Southeast Missouri Transportation operates a fleet of 116 vehicles out of their own facility to connect the general public in 26 counties in Southeast and South Central Missouri. More than 300,000 trips were provided in 2004. And William Osborne, known to all as Bill, has been there since the beginning.

"We knew there was a need, so we met that need," says Osborne. "We've been doing it ever since, and though the need has changed through the years, and so has our service, our commitment to the people we serve — our values — has never changed."

In addition to local curbside service for shopping, medical appointments, recreation and personal business, Southeast Missouri Transportation provides

long-distance connections to major medical facilities in St. Louis, Cape Girardeau and Springfield. Under special contracts, the system provides transportation for sheltered workshops, dialysis facilities, prisoner-family programs, women's programs, the Workforce Invest-

Rae (l) and Eleanora enjoy their independence as driver LC connects them with their community.



ment Board of Southeast Missouri and Medicaid.

Investment for Southeast Missouri Transportation comes through the Missouri Department of Transportation, Southeast Missouri and Central Missouri Area Agencies on Aging, Southwest Missouri Office on Aging and rider donations.

The system funds replacement vehicles and other needs with the support of local individuals, businesses and civic groups.

Focusing on these details, programs and figures — important though they are — is to miss the real story of Southeast Missouri Transportation, a story repeated around the country and recognizable as one uniquely

SHOW *Me*: OUR VALUES

community transportation.

LuAnne Moyers, Southeast Missouri Transportation's Financial Assistant and Medicaid Transportation Supervisor, who came on board in 1981, says the system periodically reevaluates service in each county it serves.

"What's needed today may not be the same as when schedules were created a year ago," explains Moyers. "The key word for transportation is flexibility."

Southeast Missouri Transportation faces the common challenges of insurance expenses and fuel costs. Amidst these discussions, the system's objective is never far away. She pulls out the letter page of a local small-town newspaper as a reminder.

Gratitude expressed in a letter to the editor from an out-of-town gentleman touched by Southeast Missouri Transportation's caring service. His mother, a regular passenger, didn't come to the door when the bus arrived for a scheduled pick up. The driver alerted the office, and Southeast Missouri Transportation employees contacted a relative. Richard Winkler writes that his grief over his mother's sudden death was softened by the knowledge that the transit system staff care deeply about the people they're serving.

Out on the roads of southeast Missouri, that caring shines through immediately.

"If it wasn't for them, I'd be sitting at home staring at four walls," says Eleanora of Southeast Missouri Transportation's invaluable service. "I wouldn't be able to get out."

Certainly not sitting at home, Eleanora joins neighbor Rae on an outing with driver LC.



"It's just like a family," says Lorraine, with her driver LC.



souri Transportation bus together.

"It's great to have my independence," says Rae, seated behind Eleanora today.

Until last year, Rae continued working as a nurse at the Madison Medical Center. After retirement — at age 80 — she's continued with volunteer work in the Center's gift shop, alongside Eleanora. And, like her neighbor, Rae is also a regular library patron — she likes a Nora Roberts novel or a John Grisham thriller.

"We don't exist just to work or to go to medical appointments," emphasizes Moyers. "It's not just what you need to do but also what you want to do."

"The drivers know us real well," says Eleanora. "They know our schedule, how long we're likely to take in the store. If we have a doctor's appointment, they're very good about getting us there on time."

"They even get us to our beauty shop appointments on time!" adds Rae.

"That might even be more important," says LC, our Southeast Missouri Transportation driver, who winks to the passengers he's come to admire.

After more than two decades behind the wheel of a school bus — preceded by a career in the service station business — LC retired. He started driving for Southeast Missouri Transportation the following year.

"It's what you might consider a part-time job," he says. "Someone can fill in if I have to go fishing, for

instance.”

He estimates about 15 people a day board his vehicle, and he drives 100 miles or more each day. Yet these numbers don't begin to tell the story of the value of the mobility he and his system provide. How can you measure quality of life, time spent with friends and family, a sense of independence or dignity?

“My passengers need a little help,” he says, alluding to the special care Southeast Missouri Transportation drivers provide their passengers.

“Oh, he even helps us with groceries,” says Rae. “It's so nice that I can call and go get them myself.”

LC is one of two in-town Southeast Missouri Transportation drivers in Fredericktown. Together, they are serving the community Monday through Friday. The last run is supposed to be scheduled for 2:30 p.m., but a doctor's appointment that runs late could mean that LC's day lasts until 6:00 p.m., or even 7:00 p.m.

“They stay until they get everybody home,” says Rae. “You just couldn't ask for anything better.”

Eleanora and Rae know most everybody that boards the bus.

“LC picks up other people on our block. It's always, ‘Oh, how's your husband? How's so-and-so?’” says Rae.

“Where we live, every single person in the neighborhood has ridden at one time or another,” adds Eleanora. “Sometimes it's like old home week when we're all on the bus!”

They're encouraging to newcomers, knowing that the transition to transit is difficult for some.

“It can take people months to adjust,” says Rae. “Our friend from church took a fall. And now she's on the van, and she might just stay!” adds Eleanora enthusiastically.

She and Rae go way back. Rae's husband performed the marriage service for Eleanora and her husband!

She and Rae start listing off all the connections Southeast Missouri Transportation makes for them and their neighbors — going to get flu shots earlier this year, a trip to the annual reenactment of the Civil War's Battle of Fredericktown, May's Azalea Festival

(this year's theme is A Tribute to Life, and Southeast Missouri Transportation will be represented by the festival's first ever float), trips to the airport, visits to St. Louis.

“If people didn't have transportation, they couldn't stay living independently,” says Eleanora.

While both women are more than happy to boast about Southeast Missouri Transportation, they say the community is getting to know the service provider better through a public service announcement that's been running on TV. Rae, with a starring role in the short spot, is starting to get recognized around town.

“Oh, you're the SMTS lady, aren't you?!” she says, mimicking her growing fan base. “A friend called my daughter from Kansas City and asked, ‘Do you know that lady from Fredericktown on TV?!’”

LC steers the vehicle over to a store to pick up Lorraine. The retailer recognizes the transit-element of its clientele. Benches are made available — outside when the weather is nice, inside during inclement weather — where passengers can sit until their ride arrives. Next door, a grocer makes sure your purchases are double bagged if you'll be getting on the bus.

Lorraine guesses that she's been riding with Southeast Missouri Transportation for some 15 years.

“I had to give up driving. It was terrible, but something I knew I had to do,” she remembers. “These

“We are about people,” says SMTS' LuAnn Moyers.



SHOW *Me*: OUR VALUES

kind, courteous drivers made it a lot easier. Now I've adjusted. I enjoy meeting the people. I don't know all the names but at least all the faces. It's just like a family."

Eleanora sums up her transit experience.

"It's available. It's inexpensive. If you need to go somewhere, it's there," she says. "The ladies in the office know who you are. You don't even have to give them your address."

LC drops off Eleanora and Rae in front of their homes. After their thank yous and good byes, they both walk up the sidewalk a ways before parting, as each one heads for her front door across the street from the other.

"I can see how this service fits the needs of so many people," says LC, steering the bus back to the Southeast Missouri Transportation facility at the end of the day, and thinking out loud about his own needs. "Will I use it myself someday? That's in my mind, sure."

The simplicity of the concept — seeing that people need a way to get there and making the connection — belies the complexity of actually making it all hap-

pen. But on this day, the focus is clearly upon the service and the passengers.

"We're helping people get where they need to go," says Moyers. "What's the sense in having a beauty shop, a doctor's office, a meal site if people can't get there? We are about people. It's the focus that got this all started. Somebody cared about people."

And then, in a single sentence, she finds the very heart of community and public transportation.

"These are communities, not just places," says Moyers.

More than 30 years ago, Southeast Missouri Transportation was launched because a group of people understood that, indeed, the 26 counties in this part of Missouri were important places, and that the people who lived there were important, too. And the values that have inspired many a community and public transportation operation since — flexibility and freedom, independence and choice, service and dedication — are what continues to move Southeast Missouri Transportation into its next 30 years.

Eleanora (l) and Rae head home... to addresses Southeast Missouri Transportation knows by heart.

