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Upcoming Events:

April 6-7, 2016
RTAC Spring Conference, Springfield
April 23, 2016
RTAC Roadeo, New Berlin

On-Site Driver Training and Classroom Driver Training
(Call RTAC: 800.526.9943)

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RTAC Notes

Congratulations to Christian County which began receiving rural public transportation services in late November of last year! The system operator is Central Illinois Public Transit (CIPT), directed by Kim Adair. You can read all the details in a feature article on page seven of this issue.

It won’t be long before four more counties (Calhoun, Green, Jersey, and Menard) will also be receiving Section 5311 services. Sangamon County is also slated to start up in the future, but that date has not been determined. After Sangamon, the Section 5311 growth of the past ten years will be completed, and each rural county except Henderson will have public transportation services. Many rural transit systems utilize scheduling and dispatching software, and likely all will be doing so in the not-too-distant future. The end goal is a seamless statewide public transportation network.

Tri-County Transit will serve the southwestern Illinois counties of Calhoun, Greene, and Jersey. The grantee is Jersey County, the system administrator and operator is Illinois Valley Economic Development (IVEDC), and the transportation director is Lacey Range. IVEDC has long provided transportation services for individuals with disabilities and seniors, and therefore was the logical choice as operator for public transit services. Tri-County Transit expects to begin operations in late April.

Sangamon Menard Area Regional Transportation (SMART) will serve Menard County in central Illinois. The grantee is Sangamon County, which will also administer and operate the service. Sangamon plans to begin rural transit services in their own county at a later date, along with contractual service to the urbanized area outside the boundaries of Springfield Mass Transit District. The transportation director is Kate Downing, who used to manage transportation for Sangamon County Senior Services. SMART hopes to start Menard services in mid-April.

In addition to the aforementioned new faces, four HSTP coordinators have joined the rural transit environment within the past year—Zoe Keller (Region 8), Hannah Martin (Region 5), Josh Mercer (Regions 4 and 7), and Kim Zimmerman (Regions 1 and 3). I’m sure all have lots of questions. Our conference on April 6-7 will include panel discussions about Program Compliance Oversight Monitor (PCOM) roles and responsibilities, operations, budget formulation, and non-emergency medical transportation. We will provide plenty of handouts, including a rural transit glossary of terms, and encourage audience participation. Don’t be afraid to ask questions! This is your chance to learn from the experts. We’ll see you in April.
IPTA Notes

In the first decade of the 21st century, the US experienced unprecedented increases in the price of fuel, at some points even topping $4 per gallon. Many believe the public transportation industry reaped the benefits to some extent through increased ridership. I don't think any of us ever predicted that some 10 years later, we might be faced with the opposite problem. With gas prices consistently lower than we've seen them in almost 20 years, will consumers be more likely to go back to their personal vehicles rather than continuing to choose public transportation? Many would argue that the upswing in transit ridership of the past 10 years has not had as much to do with gas prices as it has been a more permanent cultural and attitudinal change toward public transportation.

Whatever the case may be, there is no doubt that the industry needs to be at the top of its game to retain its current riders and attract new ones. As with any business, excellent customer service is the best way to keep your customers, (in this case the riders) coming back. After all, the transit business is all about the passengers. So why shouldn't customer service be one of our primary concerns? Up to date technology, new buses, and clean facilities are all important, but how your employees interact with the riders is at the core of good customer service and is ultimately what will make them repeat riders.

To be able to provide good customer service, public transportation agencies must first properly train their front line employees. Drivers, dispatchers, and anyone who may come in contact with the passengers should receive customer service training and refresher training regularly. In fact, don't be afraid to provide customer service training to all new employees. This will help to emphasize the importance of customer service in your agency's culture. Transit system administrators should be stressing the importance of demonstrating a professional, positive and friendly attitude at all times when interacting with riders.

Customer service training should also include conflict resolution training. Inevitably drivers and dispatchers will encounter difficult customers or will have to help resolve a conflict between customers at some point in their career. Being properly trained on how to react and respond when conflict arises, can have a direct impact, should something minor escalate into a major incident.

It is also important to recognize good customer service when we see or hear about it. Managers should take the time to formally and informally acknowledge instances of good customer service that they witness or are told about. Often we tend to get caught up in focusing on negative behavior or incidents. But recognizing the positive behavior, I believe often has a greater impact. APTA offers an annual Customer Service Challenge competition at the Bus and Paratransit Conference and a Call Center Challenge at the committee’s annual workshop. The challenges for front line transit employees present real-life scenarios that test bus operators and dispatchers on their ability to resolve them. Consider sending employees to the conference or hosting a challenge of your own.

The key to building and retaining ridership is making the customer’s experience as seamless and pleasant as possible. The riders’ interactions with transit system employees, both on the phone and in person while riding, will very likely have the greatest impact on whether choice riders will return. And for those non-choice riders that may have no other alternative, their experience while scheduling a ride or riding the bus will often impact their attitude toward fellow riders and transit employees during future trips. Make the investment in developing a culture at your agency that stresses the importance of high quality customer service and things beyond your control (like declining gas prices) will hopefully not have a negative impact on your ridership.

Laura Calderon
TRANSIT MOVERS

Transit Movers recognizes people in Illinois transit who have been promoted, changed responsibilities, moved to a different transit agency, etc. If there are people within your agency who fall into these categories, contact the RTAC staff at 800.526.9943, e-mail rtac@wiu.edu or fax 309.298.2162. Please include pictures!

**Hannah Martin** is a new transportation planner with Tri-County Regional Planning Commission (TCRPC) and the new Human Services Transportation Plan (HSTP) Coordinator for Region 5 (Fulton, Knox, Marshall, Peoria, Stark, Tazewell, and Woodford Counties). During summer 2013 Hannah began an internship at TCRPC with large amounts of her time spent working with their Geographic Information Systems (GIS) department. This led to a position with Woodford County as their map technician until returning to TCRPC just last year. With a degree in civil engineering from Bradley University, Hannah is enjoying the opportunity to work with the many aspects of transportation in her community.

Hannah hails from Tinley Park, IL but decided to make her home in Central Illinois. She lives in Peoria with her best friend and a cat named Bob. In her spare time, she enjoys working on her house with her dad. A self-described “occasional runner”, she prefers to watch college basketball players run up and down the court any day of the week.

**Jolene Abney** recently accepted the position of transportation coordinator for Abilities Plus in January. Jolene grew up in the Stark County area, attending Stark County High School and Illinois State University, where she graduated in 2014 with a degree in business management, specializing in human resource management. After college, Jolene moved to Atkinson, Illinois and worked for Henry County Health Department as a homecare coordinator.

Jolene loves to read, take Zumba classes, babysit her nephews, and watch *Friends* reruns. Recently married in October 2015, Jolene is also enjoying organizing all wedding pictures and videos. Jolene currently resides in Annawan, Illinois with her husband.
Spotlight

The Spotlight is on Dedra Mannon, transit coordinator
Galesburg Handivan

1. If you didn’t have a transit background, how did you learn the ropes?

The best information I received was attending the conferences and listening to conversations of other rural transit professionals. I also learned through asking questions about things I didn’t know, as well as the process of working issues out as they occurred. I also found the FTA website to be a wealth of information.

2. Toughest day-to-day operational problem:

The toughest was not having a home for our operation. When I began working at Handivan we were stationed out of a community center and all of our vehicles were stored off site. Then the community center was sold and we moved to a conference room on the second floor of City Hall, again with our vehicles off site and very little contact with my staff. Finally we moved into the new facility in September 2015 and things are much nicer. I now have daily interaction with staff and inspection of vehicles can occur indoors. The training and break rooms are onsite, which all allows me to work with and actually get a chance to get to know my staff.

3. What’s a typical day like?

A typical day is seven to eight vans moving passengers all over Galesburg to numerous appointments, working on improving our operations, talking with passengers, and training our passengers on how the Handivan operates.

4. What’s your proudest achievement?

I have a staff of 16 who all work together to help each other out when needed. They look out for each other and truly care for our passengers. It’s not just a job at the Handivan, it’s an opportunity to make a difference in someone’s life—you might be their only contact or communication for that day.

5. What motivates you?

I always want to make the right choice for my passengers and my employees. We allow a passenger independence that they would not have otherwise, and I never want to do anything to jeopardize that. A position in the Handivan means you are trusted to maintain yourself in the safest and most responsible manner possible. As city employees we are held to a standard of excellence and I never want my employees to feel like they are not appreciated.

— Spotlight continued on page 6
Kathy Gable has been the transit director of Jo Daviess County Transit since December 1, 2015. She was born and raised in Hanover, Illinois, and graduated from Hanover High School and Illinois State University with a major in English and a minor in law. After college, she worked for many years in Chicago and in San Diego as a corporate paralegal for Wilson Sporting Goods Company. Kathy also worked in the owner’s skybox for the Chicago White Sox, where she was able to meet some of her sporting goods heroes…from Michael Jordan and Scottie Pippen to Minnie Minoso …she waited on them all!

The best decision Kathy and her husband, professional comedian Steve Moris, ever made was moving back from California to raise their son Stevie in Hanover, Illinois. They now live within walking distance to Grandpa Gable, Uncle Ryan, and all of the Sullivan relatives. Kathy says family is everything, and quotes from The Royal Tenebaums movie, “Family isn’t a word, it’s a sentence!”

Kathy says she is excited about working at Jo Daviess County Transit. She has long admired what the organization has stood for and the passion the employees have for making Jo Daviess County a better place.

6. What do you do to motivate your staff?

We work hard during the day and often just having a luncheon will bring staff together and give them an outlet for conversation. At all trainings a meal is provided at no expense to the staff. Keeping in contact with staff about work and paying attention to what the employee is telling you are very large parts of our workplace morale. Get invested in your staff! Know their birthday, congratulate them on their anniversary, and ask them about their kids. It’s easy if you take the time to make them a priority.

7. How has your system grown, and why?

Growth is largely due to our staff’s compassion towards our passengers. We currently offer transportation to more than 10 percent of our population as registered clients. A passenger’s family member often calls to arrange home visits with myself and the potential passenger to explain the process of registration. Fear of the unknown is taken away when the potential passenger is sitting with their loved one in the comfort of their home discussing their transportation needs. Often the passenger is unable to drive but still able to live independently. Transportation is the missing piece to keeping the loved one in the home versus an assisted living center, and we are grateful to be able to make that passenger mobile.
TAYLORVILLE -- Officials with a newly implemented public transit program in Christian County are hoping a wider variety of the population there will take advantage of the system and that it will pay economic dividends down the road.

After some fits and starts, Central Illinois Public Transit (CIPT), operated through the C.E.F.S. Economic Opportunity Corporation, rolled out on Nov. 19 with Monday-through-Friday service in the county.

Residents can use the door-to-door transportation to get to doctors appointments, get to work or work interviews or to go shopping.

And while the ridership is open to anyone, marketing it, said Jennifer Moore, mobility manager for CIPT and Effingham County Public Transportation, has been a different ballgame.

"Public transportation in the rural community is still somewhat of a new concept," admitted Moore. "Most people think of it as transportation for senior citizens, for persons with disabilities and for low-income people. That is just not the case (exclusively)."

"We are open to anyone, to any age, with any income. This is a big hurdle in marketing the program."

The challenges have also brought opportunities.

Moore, who markets ridership in four of the seven central Illinois counties CIPT serves, has become a one-person band for the program, talking to groups of any size, offering to ride with people unsteady about the bus service and marketing the service for special outings.

Two of those outings included transporting a group of Taylorville High School students to a Creating Entrepreneurial Opportunities program at O'Shea Builders in Springfield and transporting people to a food pantry at the high school just before Thanksgiving.

"I have a lot of appreciation (for CIPT) in both those instances," said Amy Hagen, market president of U.S. Bank in Taylorville. "It's a demonstration that they want to be part of the community."
“Sometimes (a program like CIPT) has to figure out what it can do differently. But I know business people are thrilled that it’s come about.”

**Economic impact**

The service, said Christian County Board Chairman Paul Schmitz, could be a boon to a couple of the area’s largest employers, including Grain Systems Inc., which is based in Taylorville and Assumption and is the world’s largest manufacturer of steel farm bins, storage grains bins and grain silos; and MBM Foodservice Distribution., a national company that has a center in Taylorville.

CIPT director Kim Adair added that while the service increases residents’ access and mobility, it could also “improve local economic development paths for future business growth.”

Moore said it was too early to determine any measurable economic impact the service had on the county. From Nov. 19 to Nov. 30, Moore said 72 riders used the service.

Schmitz said the county board had tried to land a public transportation plan over the last five years. Earlier in the year, the county board picked the Senior Citizens Center in Taylorville as the plan’s administrator in part because the center ran its own limited transportation service, but the Senior Center backed out in April citing its changed economic picture.

That’s when the board turned to C.E.F.S., which already operated transportation systems in Clay, Fayette, Montgomery, Moultrie, Shelby and Effingham counties.

“"The county board was always supportive of what was going on (relative to public transportation)," said Schmitz. "Every time there was a black mark, we’d erase it and go on to the next step."

CIPT is not designed to be in competition with Senior Center transportation or local taxi service, said Moore. In fact, if CIPT can’t accommodate riders, it refers them to those providers, Moore noted.

**Many uses**

The Rural Transit Factbook indicates that nearly 40 percent of Christian Country’s transit-dependent population -- primarily senior citizens, persons with disabilities and low-income individuals -- live in rural areas.

The factbook noted that as of 2009, there were 1,358 transit systems in rural areas across the country.

According to 2010 census figures, Christian County has a population of 34,800.

While some families may not have their own transportation, some don’t even have the luxury of calling on family, friends or spouses to help get them around to doctors appointments or for shopping, said Moore. CIPT is working with doctors and hospitals on appointment times for patients that might be more amenable to the system’s present schedule, she added.

Some riders are taking advantage of the new service in unique ways. One family, said Moore, uses CIPT to send their children to an after-school day care. Another woman has used it to visit her husband in a nursing facility.

Riders in Moultrie County have scheduled CIPT buses to take them to shopping trips in Mattoon and Decatur at designated times during the month.

Moore said the first month of CIPT’s operation proved the demand is there, with the idea that the numbers can be increased.
"The obstacle is reaching those people who want transportation and don't know we're here," she said. "The focus is on anyone who needs a ride and doesn't already have one."

— Contact Steven Spearie: spearie@hotmail.com, twitter.com@StevenSpearie, facebook.com/steven.spearie.

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When: 7 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday

Cost: $3 one way, $35 monthly pass (discounts apply)

Reservations: 855-755-2478

For more information, visit www.cefseoc.org.

About C.E.F.S. Economic Opportunity Corporation

The not-for-profit community action agency develops, implements and evaluates social service programs to assist economically and socially disadvantaged persons in seven central Illinois counties: Clay, Effingham, Fayette, Shelby, Moultrie, Christian and Montgomery. (C.E.F.S. stands for Clay, Effingham, Fayette and Shelby, the four original counties that made up the agency.) C.E.F.S. administers the Head Start program for preschool-aged children and Golden Circle Nutrition Program for senior citizens, in addition to overseeing the Central Illinois Public Transportation program. Its other services focus on energy counseling, literacy programs and housing rehabilitation. This year, C.E.F.S. has served over 15,000 people and 7,300 households.

http://www.sj-r.com/article/20151221/NEWS/151229923

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GALESBURG — HandiVan and Galesburg Transit have moved into the new facility on Monmouth Boulevard, and officials from both departments are excited to have their own space.

HandiVan Coordinator Dedra Mannon and Kraig McCluskie, general manager of Galesburg Transit, both said one of their favorite features of the new building is the extra space to work in.

“We went from about 3,500 square feet to 21,000 square feet, so that was a big change,” McCluskie said.

“I think the most important part is that … we finally have a facility that we can call home where before the vehicles were stored at central garage,” Mannon said. “We would have to bring the drivers in earlier, get them off earlier because in the winter time they were scraping vehicles and in the summer time cooling them off before we go pick up passengers.”

Before moving into the new building, HandiVan was operating out of the city’s garage and Mannon set up shop in the Community Development Department’s conference room.

Galesburg Transit was leasing a building on South Farnham Street, which was so tight the workers would have to move a bus being worked on out of the shop to allow the other buses to come in and park.

The new facility features a separate maintenance bay to avoid that and provide ample space, along with an arsenal of other amenities.

Walking into the building, the HandiVan offices are to one side and Transit to the other. Customers of either one can buy tickets at the windows inside the building and talk to officials about the services.

Inside, Manon and McCluskie have their own offices, along with a conference room and a break room. While those may not seem exciting to the average person, these have been things Mannon’s drivers have gone without before the new building.

“I have better connection with my staff where before I wouldn’t see them in the morning because they would
run out and grab their vehicle and go on with their day and I would have to catch up with them periodically throughout the day,” Mannon said. “We now have a break room and a place for our own training and conferences.”

Deeper inside the facility, the garage area to house the vehicles spans from end to end. The 10 HandiVans and nine buses all have space to park along with a washing bay for the buses, which looks like an oversized car wash. The HandiVans have their own wash spot as well where workers can clean the vans with a spray wand.

The facility is entirely American made, as per the agreement with the state to secure the funding for the $4 million building. It is also equipped with LED lighting on motion sensors throughout the garage for energy efficiency.

In the garage is the maintenance bay, as well as air compressor points and a fuel tank is to come soon.

With the new facility, Galesburg Transit and HandiVan have been working closer than ever, both figuratively and literally.

“HandiVan has been great so far,” McCluskie said. “I’m glad that we’re all together because there’s no more of this, well you have to go see Dedra at another building that’s two miles away. Now anybody that comes here has the option of finding out how to ride the HandiVan or if they aren’t eligible for that they can learn how to ride the bus.”

Mannon added the service provided by both HandiVan and Galesburg Transit will only improve now that they’re in the new facility, and she hopes the general public realizes that.

“I don’t think people understand the volume of transportation in this community and the amount of significance and I hope when they drive by and they see the facility they’ll be excited about what opportunities and faster service we’re able to offer our community,” she said.

Marty Hobe (309) 343-7181, ext. 214; mhobe@register-mail.com; @mhobe55

http://www.galesburg.com/article/20151010/NEWS/151019994

RTAC thanks Marty Hobe and *The Register-Mail* for granting permission to use their article.

**A Couple Extra Pictures of HandiVan and Galesburg Transit’s New Facility**
Don’t Forget:

*RTAC Spring Conference, April 6-7
Register online for the 27th Annual RTAC Conference at:
http://www.iira.org/event-registration/?regevent_action=register&event_id=7

*RTAC Roadeo, April 23
Call or email to register for the 14th Annual RTAC Roadeo at:
800.526.9943 or JS-Waters@wiu.edu