



## Feature Story

With Respect, Honor  
& Gratitude  
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# OATS Transit's Executive Director Celebrates 35 Years

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

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OATS, Inc. (dba OATS Transit) is a private, not-for-profit transportation provider serving 87 Missouri counties. Transportation is available to the general public in rural areas. In urban areas (Columbia, St. Louis, St. Joseph, Springfield, Kansas City) service is limited to contract service, and not available to the general public. Contact your local OATS Transit office for service available to you, or to enter into an agreement to pay for services.

OATS Transit operates its programs and services without regard to race, color, and national origin in accordance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act. We are an equal opportunity employer M/F/H/V.

Relay Missouri is available to individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind, and/or speech impaired. Use the Relay Missouri service by calling 711 to talk with an OATS representative or to schedule your trip.

#### OATS Transit Board of Directors

President: Krissy Sinor  
Vice President: Scott Kosky  
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Members: Angie Crowder, Edna Foster, John Griesheimer, Jeff Leeman, Patricia Mefford, Essence Montgomery, Tammy Nadler, Julie Rodgers, Rex Scott, Stacey Steffens and Andrew Warlen.

Board Meetings are held six times each year & open to the public.

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Bus schedules & fare information can be found at:

[www.oatstransit.org/schedules](http://www.oatstransit.org/schedules)  
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Cover photo: Ken Burgan, U.S. Army Veteran and OATS Transit Rider.

Where has the time gone? I can't believe it's been 35 years since I started working for OATS Transit. While it may seem unusual in this day and age to stay with one company for such a long time, it is not so unusual here at OATS Transit as several of my co-workers have been here even longer.



I know it is an old cliché to say it is the people that kept me here, but in this case, it is very true. When I reflect back on my career, it is the many drivers, volunteers, riders, Board members, and fellow staff who I've met along the way that come to mind.

Another reason why I've made OATS Transit my life-long career is the number of different roles I was able to take on within this large organization. Over the years I was able to try my hand at many different jobs from marketing to human resources to administration. Every time I felt myself getting bored or restless, a new opportunity would come along to reignite my interest. There was never a need to move on to find new challenges – there was always plenty to be found right here.

One of the benefits of being around so long is having already been through so many trials and tribulations and knowing OATS Transit has the resiliency to come through whatever is thrown our way. Our history proves this. Although I must say the last two years dealing with the pandemic put that theory to the test. I thought I'd seen it all – March 2020 taught me otherwise. But as with past challenges, OATS Transit weathered the storm and came through the other side, though not entirely unscathed as we're still rebuilding to get back to pre-COVID levels.

The transit industry and workplace, in general, were very different back in 1987 and I've seen the many changes technology has brought. Although there are days when it feels like it would be so much easier if we could just track our schedules on a paper "trip sheet" like we used to, the new systems have made us much more efficient and cost-effective. It's also kept our work interesting as it is always exciting to embark on a new process that will, at the end of the day, enable us to provide better service to the many thousands of Missourians who rely on us.

One thing has not changed and that is the fact OATS Transit continues to attract wonderful people to work here or volunteer their services. We have a group of caring, hard-working people who serve our riders with courtesy and respect. Our people truly care about OATS Transit and the services we provide.

# Sunderland Foundation Awards Grant to OATS Transit

OATS Transit has received a grant from the Sunderland Foundation totaling \$100,000 for its new transportation hub in the Kansas City area.

*The Sunderland Foundation is a family foundation rooted in Kansas City with a history of supporting capital building projects. It has focused on supporting brick-and-mortar projects, awarding grants to 501(c)(3) nonprofits in the Kansas City region and other areas since 1945.*

In early 2022, OATS Transit purchased a property for a new operations facility in Lee's Summit MO, just off I-470. Construction is expected to begin in 2023 and is planned for completion in 2025. The facility will oversee specialized transportation in Jackson, Cass, Clay, and Platte counties. OATS Transit provides transportation for medical appointments, work, essential shopping, and more. In addition to rural service for individuals of any age, OATS Transit operates the RideKC buses in Lees Summit, which is a partnership with the City of Lee's Summit and the Kansas City Area Transit Authority.



Artist rendering of the new operations facility.

"Thanks to the support from the Sunderland Foundation this grant allows us to match our federal dollars with local funds," said Dorothy Yeager, Executive Director of OATS Transit. "We are excited to be building and expanding in the Kansas City area market in the near future," added Yeager.

## Foundations & Businesses Providing Support

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

- **Sisters of Charity**- \$12,000 toward service in Pettis County
- **Sunderland Foundation** - \$100,000 toward our new facility in Lee's Summit

To find out how you can support public transportation in your local community, call OATS Transit Development staff at 573-443-4516, or email [jstedem@oatstransit.org](mailto:jstedem@oatstransit.org). Your support is important so we can continue being there for individuals who need rides to medical appointments, work and so much more!

## Rhonda Proctor Joins OATS Transit

OATS Transit is pleased to announce our new Marketing & Training Specialist, Rhonda Stone Proctor. She comes to us with several years of experience in marketing, training, and education, so she will be a great addition to our team.

A little-known fact about Rhonda is her mother, Ruth Stone, worked for OATS Transit in the late 70s, so she has a long family history with our company.

She is eager to start working with our drivers across the state and learning from each of them. Please help us welcome Rhonda!





## With Respect, Honor and Gratitude

There are nearly twenty million veterans in the United States. Many have undergone ordeals that most civilians are unable to fathom. In honor of Veterans Day, we are sharing stories about a few of our Veterans who either work for OATS Transit or use our services. We hope you enjoy hearing about the sacrifices they made to ensure your freedom as an American.

**Ken Burgan** of Columbia is 87-years-old and rides with OATS Transit three times each week for medical treatments. Ken enlisted in 1953 to serve in the U.S. Army. He recalls being 16 years old and working with his father to shuck corn by hand on their 100-acre family farm which was very hard labor. While shucking the corn one day, Ken told his dad that he had enlisted in the Army and was ready to go serve his country. He went to basic training in Arkansas, then was stationed at Fort Riley, Kansas, before being stationed in Illinois, Texas, Louisiana & Wisconsin during the Korean War. Serving in the military runs in the family. Ken had two older brothers who were drafted into service during WWII and served time overseas. During his time in Louisiana, he recalls camping in the woods during the winter. His duty was to carry explosive devices after training exercises. He recalls carrying one device on his shoulder by himself that weighed 200 pounds which was more than he weighed. Ken said military life was a great educational opportunity and he stayed for three years. Serving in the military helped him get many jobs after he left the Army. Ken worked at a brick plant in Fulton, the Fulton Police Department, the U.S. Mint in Denver, the VA Hospital in Columbia, and as Police Chief in a Wisconsin town, before finally settling back in Columbia.



Growing up in rural northern Missouri, **Darwin George** recalls having a hard time finding a job after high school. Darwin ended up volunteering for the draft in 1969 for the Vietnam War. The day he enlisted, he said he was nervous and did not know what to expect since there was an active war occurring. Due to his brother already

serving in Vietnam, the military sent Darwin to Fort Wainwright, Alaska. He did an 18-month assignment in the Airborne Infantry as a paratrooper while in Alaska. A paratrooper is a service member who has undergone training to use a parachute in combat deployment. They bring in equipment and supplies needed for any mission and assist in natural disasters, such as search-and-rescue missions. Darwin recalls that the hardest part of living in Alaska was adjusting to only two hours of darkness in the summer and two hours of daylight in the winter. In 1970, his company did a field maneuver in 120 inches of snow, through mountainsides, and even walked on ice glaciers. The vast countryside and beautiful scenery were the nicest part of serving there recalls Darwin. Darwin left the military as a Sergeant after his two years of service. When asked what he would tell young people today who are considering joining the military, he said the experience is something that you will never forget, and never get anywhere else.



As the safety manager at OATS Transit's home office, **John Fields** works with employees to make sure that everyone is observing safe work practices. Part of his training for this position comes from past military experience. John enlisted in the U.S. Air Force in 1972, serving during the Vietnam and Cold Wars. He spent time



in the Royal Air Force Alconbury near Huntingdon, England, U.K., and worked with nuclear weapon systems. In 1979, John had the opportunity to meet First Lady Rosalynn Carter as she was on the Presidential campaign trail in Northern Maine. He, along with other Air Force Security Police, was part of her security detail. Before Mrs. Carter boarded a plane, she shook all of their hands and thanked them for their service. John served over 11 years and said that he made lasting friendships during this military service, and it was one of the greatest times of his life. His advice for young people is that the military will provide opportunities to learn new skills that will help a person throughout their lives.



**Jeff Leeman** has served on the OATS, Inc. board since March 2020, representing the Midwest Region. Jeff was in the ROTC program while in college and the day he graduated from college, he headed to California to start his military duties. He began training as an ICBM Launch Officer at Van-

denberg Air Force Base in Lompoc, California. He served during the Vietnam War era and was part of the Document Courier Program, spending time in Vietnam, Thailand, England, Germany, Diego Garcia, and Guam. He also spent a temporary duty deployment in Minot, North Dakota, during the harsh winter months. Being a missile launch officer, there was a lot that he was not able to discuss with friends and family which made it difficult. Jeff ended up back in mid-Missouri at Whiteman Air Force Base where he met his wife and settled into civilian life. He served in the U.S. Air Force from 1972 to 1981 and was a Captain when he left.

**Jeff Robinson** has been with OATS Transit since 2007. In 2013, he became our Regional Director for the Southwest Region, overseeing operations in 17 counties. Jeff did a delayed enlistment, going into the Air Force directly after high school,

and recalls being very excited about his career choice. During his service, Jeff made several military moves, starting in San Antonio, Texas, then to Hawaii, and deployments to Korea, Alaska, Philippines, North Dakota, Portugal, Texas, Kansas, Nebraska, Afghanistan and Kyrgyzstan before finally coming home to



Rogersville in December 2006. Jeff served during three active wars (Afghanistan, Iraqi Freedom, and Enduring Freedom). Jeff served for over 27 years, from June 1979 to December 2006, before retiring as a Chief Master Sergeant (E-9). He met his wife Carol during his time in Hawaii. Carol also served in the Air Force for six years. The hardest part of being in the military was balancing your commitment to the military, while at the same time ensuring quality family time. Jeff said that he would tell a young person today that the military was a great way of life and worth the commitment. Helping other nations secure their freedom was of great importance to Jeff and he is proud of his service and accomplishments during his service to the United States.

**Tommy Henderson** is an OATS Transit driver in our Mideast Region for 14 years, mainly in Jefferson County. Tommy joined the U.S. Army in 1969 and was deployed to Vietnam when he was 19 years old, right after high school. During his time of service, he was also deployed to Germany twice and once to Korea. Tommy served for 20 years and retired as a Sergeant First Class. He felt that it was a great experience and that every young person should serve. Tommy is especially proud of his son's 25-year career with the Marines. His son retired as a Sergeant Major.



## Thank you for your service!





# FY22 in the Books!

*Thank you to our dedicated team of drivers, our riders and our communities for your support!*

Over the last two years we have been dealing with many challenges. With five decades of transit and non-profit experience, coupled with a team of dedicated employees, we continue to weather the storm. We have weathered the COVID pandemic, driver shortages, vehicle production delays, parts shortages for bus maintenance, high fuel cost, service reductions, and finding local match funding for operations, all while continuing to be there for our riders. These disruptions have brought on many obstacles at once. While it is certainly a lot to undertake, we have an excellent staff who continue to do what they do because they believe helping our riders! Below is a account of our services over the last five years.

## A 5 Year Companywide Comparison

<u>Year</u>	<u># of Trips</u>	<u>Miles</u>	<u>Hours</u>
<b>FY22</b>	956,492	11,206,262	591,697
<b>FY21</b>	824,591	9,602,459	547,490
<b>FY20</b>	1,025,692	10,395,611	590,613
<b>FY19</b>	1,420,691	14,653,297	772,282
<b>FY18</b>	1,551,313	15,650,547	821,368

## Ways to Honor Those Who Have Served on Veterans Day

With Veterans Day approaching, it can be difficult to know how you can contribute and support our nation's servicemen and women. Here are a few ways that you can support:

- Make a care package for a veteran who is at a local VA hospital or care facility.
- Complete yard work for a veteran. Get your neighbors involved and make it a fun day filled with laughter.
- Write to your newspaper about the importance of veterans in your community.
- Donate to a not-for-profit that supports or helps veterans, such as OATS Transit, Gary Sinise Foundation, etc. Make sure you to check the not-for-profit giving score at [charitynavigator.org](http://charitynavigator.org).
- Decorate graves. Go to a local cemetery and decorate graves of deceased veterans with flags.
- Visit a VA Hospital or retirement home. See if your local Veterans Hospital or retirement home needs volunteers or is allowing visitors and head over to help with whatever they need. You might just make a new friend through your visit.
- Hang a flag. Decorate your home with a flag and show your support.
- Watch a documentary about a recent or historic war and learn about the leaders and their families.
- Research your family veterans and learn about their service. Several of the genealogy sites offer a free trial period and many local libraries offer free access.

# Employee Anniversaries

The employees listed below celebrated an anniversary July - September 2022. Thank you to each of these employees for your hard work and dedication to OATS Transit!

## 25 years:

Linda Ketchum - Northeast Driver

## 20 years:

Steve Kaninsky - Mid-MO Driver

## 15 years:

Jeff Robinson - Southwest Regional Director

## 10 years:

Stacia Twillegar - Midwest Driver  
Wally McCown, Jr. - Midwest Driver  
Ron Oakes - Midwest Driver  
Joy DelValle - Midwest Driver  
Kenny Martin - Midwest Driver  
Mike Dodds - Mid-MO Driver

## Did You Know? The Behind the Scenes Look

Enhancing quality of life by providing safe, caring, and reliable transportation services is the mission of OATS Transit. Our first-line heroes, the drivers, take extensive training to know how to offer top-notch care and driving expertise to all of our riders. Drivers drive through obstacle courses, learn proper backing procedures, wheelchair securement, and even how to assist riders in exiting the vehicle. OATS Transit is very fortunate that each of the eight regions has onsite trainers who share their wealth of knowledge with new drivers.

Over the past two years, a comprehensive training program was established to ensure that all regions were training their drivers in the same methods and ways. This also assisted with meeting some Federal reporting requirements and insurance mandates. OATS Transit is grateful for our onsite trainers and regional directors' support during some of these necessary changes.

What does this mean to you, the reader? Know that OATS Transit takes our commitment to our riders, drivers, employees, donors, and supporting agencies very seriously. Our services range from taking toddlers to preschool, getting people to work each day, taking patients to life-saving medical appointments, and assisting people to continue to live independently. Services are available to everyone without regard to race, color, religion, national origin, sex, disability, age, military or veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or any other factor prohibited by law. With 51 years of service, we continue to offer unique transportation services that make a difference in the communities we serve.



(Top photo) A new driver goes through the obstacle course. (Bottom photo) Driver Trainer Mike discusses the backing requirements with a new driver. Photo credits: OATS Transit

## Do You “Like” or “Follow” OATS Transit?

With the world around us constantly evolving with technology and social media, OATS Transit is working on updating all of the ways to get information to you. We will be posting information about upcoming events, bus schedule changes, job opportunities, and important news. Don't worry if you are not on social media, you can reach us by phone during normally scheduled business hours.



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[instagram.com/oatstransit](https://instagram.com/oatstransit)



[youtube.com/c/OATSTransit](https://youtube.com/c/OATSTransit)



[linkedin.com/company/oatstransit](https://linkedin.com/company/oatstransit)



[oatstransit.org](https://oatstransit.org)

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# OATS Transit Service Area

**Northwest Region Office**  
 St. Joseph, MO  
 (816) 279-3131  
 (800) 831-9219

**Northeast Region Office**  
 Macon, MO  
 (660) 415-0901  
 (800) 654-6287

**Home Office**  
 Columbia, MO  
 (573) 443-4516  
 (888) 875-6287

**Mid-MO Region**  
 Columbia, MO  
 (573) 449-3789  
 (800) 269-6287

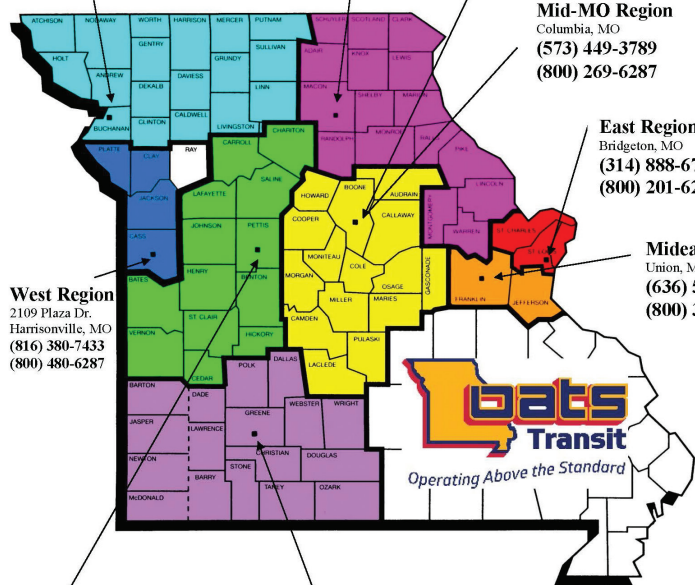
**East Region Office**  
 Bridgeton, MO  
 (314) 888-6720  
 (800) 201-6287

**Midwest Region**  
 Union, MO  
 (636) 583-1125  
 (800) 373-1631

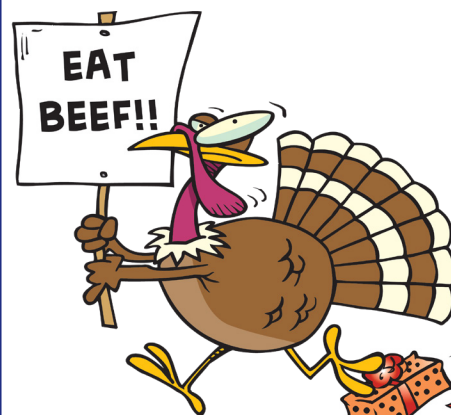
**West Region**  
 2109 Plaza Dr.  
 Harrisonville, MO  
 (816) 380-7433  
 (800) 480-6287

**Midwest Region Office**  
 Sedalia, MO  
 (660) 827-2611 (800) 276-6287

**Southwest Region Office**  
 Springfield, MO  
 (417) 887-9272 (800)770-6287



**Holiday Reminder:** OATS Transit will be closed and regular routes will not be running on Thursday and Friday, November 24th and 25th for the Thanksgiving holiday, as well as Monday, December 26th due to Christmas Day on Sunday.



Enjoy time with your friends and family!

