

## Food Pantries Partner with OATS Transit

OATS Transit has been committed to serving Missourians who are in need of public transportation for over five decades. One of the many important transportation services we provide is transportation for essential shopping. This can be as simple as a trip to a local food pantry. Food pantries, also known as commodity sites, are where hungry families can receive food and other daily living essentials. Every day we provide public transportation so Missourians can access food pantries in their community.

There are six food banks in Missouri that provide the food to more than 1,500 community feeding programs and pantries. These food pantries help ensure that no one goes hungry. Just three years ago it was estimated that 653,000 Missouri residents relied on food pantries. Since then, with grocery prices soaring nearly 30%, our Food Pantries are even more important. Today, statistics show that 1 in 8 Missourians are food insecure. Being food-insecure means an individual lacks reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food. One of the important factors to ensure individuals have access to food is reliable transportation.

OATS Transit partners with several hundred food pantries across the state to ensure people don't go hungry. One food pantry that serves southwest Missouri is the **Cassville Pantry** in Barry County. Monthly the Cassville Pantry serves 550-650 families, or approximately 1,700 individuals. "OATS Transit is critical for those who have no means of transportation, especially the elderly and homebound. These individuals have no other way to access community resources" said Food Pantry Director, Janet Mills. She estimates that roughly 40% of those using



the Cassville pantry live on a fixed income, so coming to their facility allows them to live within their means but not go hungry. Mills added that the OATS bus even brings people from the outlying communities into their Pantry monthly. "Internally we call that the OATS Bus Day and staff up with extra volunteers to ensure things runs smoothly since so many people come in at once" added Mills. Reliable transportation like what OATS Transit provides allows people to remain independent and self-reliant. Mills said even something like vehicle maintenance is too expensive for their clients if they can't afford to buy gas or keep up with repairs. The Cassville Pantry relies heavily on the OATS bus to bring their clients in.



Cassville Food Pantry Director Janet Mills visits with driver Cindy Hudson while dropping off riders.

At **Share the Harvest Food Pantry & Thrift Store** in Camdenton, transportation is one of the components they provide assistance with. "This has been a very cold winter, so we are getting more request than usual for financial

assistance with rent, utility bills and propane” said director Shana Aubuschon. Share the Harvest helps 570 families per month on average. “We have several seniors who don’t drive, so they utilize OATS Transit to get to the pantry” added Aubuschon. Among her many tasks as director of the pantry she helps get the word out about OATS Transit and its importance in Camden County. The Camden County Senior Tax Board covers fares for seniors in their county.

Tim Deen, the Food Pantry Coordinator at **Ministry Food Pantry** in Maryville MO says many people rely on OATS Transit. He stressed the importance of public transportation to help those who don’t have a way to access their community. “Many people would have no other way to get to our Pantry without the bus”, said Dean. The Maryville Food Pantry serves an average of 232 families each month. “The bus brings value to the whole community”, added Dean.



Maryville MO has daily in-town OATS service. The Ministry Center Food Pantry is a regular stop for our riders.

**Heart of the Hills Thrift Store & Food Pantry** serves all of Douglas County and is located in Ava MO. The trips to the food pantry are split up into two different days. This ensures that everyone, whether they live on the east side or west side, can get to the food pantry at least once each month.

OATS Transit partners with hundreds of food pantries around the state to ensure no one goes hungry. For more information on transportation to a food pantry in your area, visit [www.oatstransit.org](http://www.oatstransit.org), and click on the bus schedules tab or give us a call at 888-875-6287. If your local food pantry isn’t on our schedule, let them know why public transportation is important to you, and why they should partner with OATS Transit to get you and your family to their facility.



There are six Food Banks in Missouri that provide food to more than 1,500 Food Pantries in the state. This photo was taken at the Columbia MO Food Bank.



**New service  
is possible  
thanks to local  
support!**

Check out our website for details on new routes that we have been able to start recently thanks to our local funders. Local investment is required in order for us to add new routes & service.

*Recent new/additional routes include:*

- Franklin County MO InterCity route that connects with you to the Washington Amtrak Station, St. Louis Lambert International Airport and several other locations; runs every Tuesday & Thursday.
- Pike County MO InterCity service to St. Louis runs every Tuesday.
- Pike County MO InterCity service to Quincy IL runs twice a month.
- Lafayette County MO service to Kansas City, Richmond and Warrensburg.

## Show Us Your Green!

Don’t forget to wear your green on **Monday, March 17** and share your photo on our FaceBook page (@oatstransit). You can post directly to our Facebook feed on Monday the 17<sup>th</sup>.



## Update to our February story regarding state transit funding

Last month in The Wheel we ran a story provided to us by the Missouri Public Transit Association on the potential transit funding cuts for next year. We received many comments on this story and we wanted to share just a few of them with you. Our impact on people's lives are far reaching and your voice is being heard! To some we may be just a bus, but to others we are the only connection they have to their community.

*From Rider Cathy in Warrensburg:* "Please don't cut funding to the OATS Transit bus in Warrensburg! I am unable to drive because I have epilepsy."

*From Rider Taiwana in Moberly:* "We have no transportation service here in Missouri if we lose the OATS Transit bus. We only have a cab service and they are not reliable, and are very high. The OATS Transit bus is the only service I can afford."

*From Tammy, mother of a rider:* "Without the Oats Bus, I honestly don't know how my son would be able to go to work. He's been using this transportation service for four years now. He has down syndrome and getting a driver's license is not an option for him. My husband and I can't leave work to take him. Our son has built amazing relationships with his driver's who are great individuals, and to take that away from him and going to work away from him is not an option. OATS Transit is important to my son and our family!"

*From Rider Michelle in Marshall:* "I have not rode the bus with you all for one year now. I request to have you guys, but I always get private company that I do not trust. So, I cancel my appointment due to me not feeling safe with the private companies that I am stuck with. I want to ride with OATS since they are reliable and trustworthy; I feel safe with OATS."

We were also asked how to find the state representative who covers your area, which we are happy to provide. On this link you can enter your street address and city, or if you know your 9-digit zip code, you can look up that way. [www.senate.mo.gov/legislookup](http://www.senate.mo.gov/legislookup) On this link you will find your Senator, Representative, and U.S. Congressman. Also shown are the elected state officials and the U.S. Senators for Missouri.



Individuals served by CC Links in Christian County MO went to the Capital in Jefferson City in February. Among the important topics they covered was to protect their transportation to work. Pictured is driver Ty Baxter with the group from CC Links.



Drivers Rodney Stokes and Carl Gore took two buses loaded with riders from WC Partners in Webster County MO to the Capital last month. Riders spent the day making sure their voices were heard, and the services they need to remain independent were protected.

# THANK YOU!



## News from Hamilton MO



Rider Mimi (on left) pictured with Thriftstore Manager, Brandy Rumley.

“ This is one of our ladies from the Oats bus that visits our store once a month. Today she said she wanted a picture to send home to show her family the Thrift Store where she shops. She said she speaks to her 91 year old mother regularly about our little store and the people she has met. She is from Okinawa, southwest of Japan's mainland. To know our little Thrift Store brings joy and has been talked to about so many miles away..is kinda cool!!! Definitely had to share!! ”

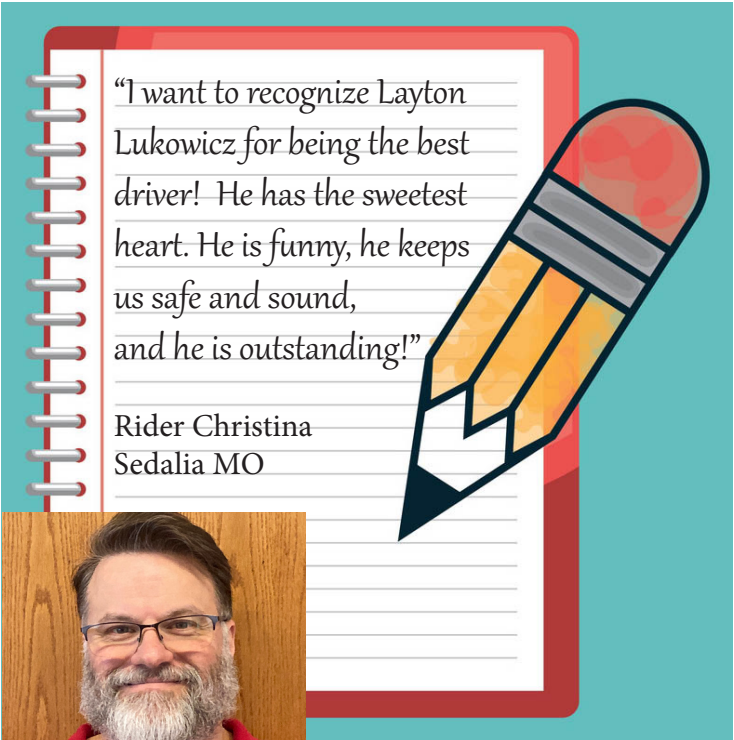
Brandy



**Amanda Wilson**  
Northwest MO  
Operations Coordinator

“Thank you Amanda! She helps schedule rides for Livingston County clients. I called around 2:20 pm asking about the status of a patient's ride. For some reason, the NEMT system didn't notify OATS about our patient's trip. Amanda took care of it and got a bus out ASAP, so the patient was able to make it to their appointment. Thanks again!!”

Stefanie  
St. Lukes Hospital-Chillicothe  
Social Worker



“I want to recognize Layton Lukowicz for being the best driver! He has the sweetest heart. He is funny, he keeps us safe and sound, and he is outstanding!”

Rider Christina  
Sedalia MO



Sedalia area driver Layton Lukowicz

“I would like to let you know how wonderful your employee Joe Wilson is. Joe has been transporting my sister for many years. She has been riding with Joe for more years than I can tell you. He treats her and all of his passengers like family. He is so cheerful, and makes their trips enjoyable. He cares for each and every one of them. We need more people like Joe in this world!”

Claudia



St.Louis area driver Joe Wilson

Please contact the editor if you have news stories or photos you would like to share with us. We would love to hear from you.

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