Greetings Family!

I want to take this time to THANK YOU! Thank you for supporting me by dropping by the office, sending an email or text or making a phone call. Your words of encouragement are more appreciated than you will ever know!

The past sixty days have been a period of assessment for me. I have been recognizing and realizing some of the fundamental needs of Chatham Area Transit. There are areas that present some weaknesses and others that demonstrate strength. We have some work to do. But, it’s work that we can accomplish together and WE WILL! We will continue to positively move forward in creating the workplace and environment that we know we can be.

On Tuesday, I presented the first draft of next year’s budget (Fiscal Year 2022 runs from July 2021 – June 30, 2022). I think you should know that when the budget process began we were faced with a $1.8 million dollar deficit. The core budget team, along with department leaders, has been chipping away at that behemoth and we have made some great strides. We are required to present, to the CAT Board, a balanced budget for their approval in June 2021. In this regard, we are thankful for the federal assistance that we have received over the past two years throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Lawmakers finally understand the critical role that public transit serves in this country. Service levels have dropped, contract services such as the dot Shuttle and others have been non-existent and we are feeling the effects of the lost revenue. However, we are encouraged that the City of Savannah is cautiously moving toward “reopening” Savannah and our revenues will once again begin streaming. Please keep in mind that we are still in a pandemic and I encourage you to continue to practice those things that the Centers for Diseases and Control and Prevention have set forth...wearing a mask, washing your hands often and social distancing.

In spite of the pandemic, these are exciting times for CAT. We have installed the charging stations to support the new electric buses that have been ordered; one has already been delivered. We are expecting the arrival of 32 new para-transit vehicles that will provide greater comfort and efficiencies for our customers that rely upon them and we are having internal discussions about new innovative ideas that will offer better service options to our fixed-route passengers.

I am sure that you all are familiar with the quote, “be the change that you want to see.” It is powerful although often not seriously considered. We all have our own ideas for how CAT can be better...the best! The American Public Transit Association (APTA) even recognized CAT as such years ago. We can get there again! I encourage you to share those ideas and thoughts. It may or may not be possible to bring to fruition. You are not limited to what has always been done or even the way it has been done. Possibilities for improvement and success are endless! But, nothing happens overnight and nothing will happen if we talk about it but fail to do our part to work toward accomplishment.

Ott St. entrance closed

Please be advised that the Ott St. door to CAT Central has been deactivated/locked and you will no longer be able to enter the building that way. You will still be able to exit the building through that door.
Safety spotlight with Chief Safety Officer Charles Hall: Hot heads

As predicted, the warm weather can create some “hot heads.” Recently, a passenger was removed from a paratransit trip by the Savannah Police Department for threatening the operator. This is intolerable and the chain of events that transpired thereafter were absolutely appropriate. While we are the trained professional, we do have a right to operate in a safe environment. The bus is our workplace. From time-to-time we may encounter “hot heads” that may have to be dealt with or removed from our workplace. Perhaps one of the greatest tools we have is understanding de-escalation.

Webster defines de-escalation as “a reduction of the intensity of a conflict or potentially violent situation.” While an internet search will reveal a cornucopia of techniques, let’s focus on the CAIRO method of de-escalation. In its simplest form, CAIRO means remaining Calm – use a neutral voice tone that remains consistent throughout the encounter. Yet, be Assertive – use a firm pitch with a calm demeanor to stabilize the situation. Informing behavior is important to the de-escalation. Here is where you make statements that let the other party know what’s going on. For example, “For safety reasons, I need to stand behind the line.” Your verbal instructions should be reinforced with a Reflective statement like “I get that you are frustrated because you are late for work. I will do my best to get you there safely.” Lastly, the Opening behavior involves posing questions that enable the escalated person to open up and express themselves. Human beings have a tendency to bring attention, mostly negative, to themselves. Doing this can also add value to the individual, while disrupting the escalation and quelling the situation.

Just remember, this is only one tool in your professional operator’s toolbox to de-escalate potentially violent encounters. What cannot happen is that you allow yourself to become overwhelmed and become a part of the problem. As a professional CAT operator, you, too, can lose in situations where you allow yourself to become a part of the problem. You run the risk of violating policies, breaking the law, or being harmed or injured. The best fight to have is the one that didn’t happen. And if all else fails, you can retreat. Stay Safe!!!

CAT recognizes Autism month

You may see CAT employees wearing multi-colored ribbons CAT Mobility has been passing out in recognition of April being National Autism Month. CAT is joining the effort to raise awareness, hoping that effort can create a rippling effect that empowers others to help and support individuals with autism & their families, said CAT Director of Paratransit Operations Brigitte Morrison. Find more information and additional resources at [https://www.autismawarenessmonth.org](https://www.autismawarenessmonth.org).