that would allow for an expanded service area and help cover the costs associated with such expansions. CAT is also seeking state funding to expand ferry services along Savannah’s water–
front to accommodate increased demand from residential and commercial developments, along with the expansion of the Sa-
vannah Convention Center.
During their visit, Stephens and Hitchens also got to see and learn about CAT’s new electric buses and charging stations. CAT is developing a plan to incorporate the emissions-free vehicles into service as a way to help cut down on maintenance costs and reduce air and noise pollution.
CAT has received six of the electric battery-powered buses, in addition to fixed and mobile charging stations. Performance tests and employee training is continuing in anticipation of phasing the electric buses into passenger service.

CAT working to move legislative priorities forward

State Representatives Ron Stephens and Bill Hitchens walk with CAT lobbyist Mike Vaquer, interim CEO Valerie Ragland and CAT Board Chairman Deidrick Cody, after taking a look at the new electric buses (seen in the background) and charging stations on Aug. 25.
Chatham Area Transit is continuing to plan for the future, while contending with today’s challenges.
On Aug. 25, CAT officials met with Georgia State Representa-
tives Ron Stephens and Bill Hitchens to discuss the transit agen-

CAT employees assist refugees with making transition to U.S.

Call Center Supervisor Ashley Wilson recently coordinated an effort in which Chatham Area Transit provided assistance to refugees transitioning to their new life in the United States.
Wilson enlisted the help of Planning Technician-Trainee Maur-
tice Boggs, Service Planner/Scheduler Joyce Eckford and Transit Customer Advocate Korynn Mingledorf in assisting the families of Inspiritus (formerly the Lutheran Services of Georgia), a non-
profit organization that welcomes refugee families that have chosen to flee war and persecution in their home country to Savannah. The refugee group consisted of six participants, who all spoke Swahili.
The goal of the CAT team was to help the families learn how to get around the community using the public transportation system. During the presentation, Wilson, Boggs, Eckford and Min-
gledorf discussed the many services that CAT offers. In addition, they took the participants on route 27 to give them a hands-on experience. (Kudos to operator Latornya Bales for her assis-
tance.) The CAT team provided the families with reference ma-
terials for future trips.

September 2021 edition

CAT careers offer opportunities for growth, rewards

Back in 2002, while working four part-time jobs to take care of six children, Joyce Eckford decided she needed a fulltime career with health and retirement benefits. Chatham Area Transit fit the bill. She applied to be a fixed-route operator and was hired, thus beginning the start of a career that has so far spanned almost two decades.
"I always use the CAT acronym to describe what the agency has done for me," Eckford said. "That includes a Career, chance for Advancement and a Transformation of my life."
For others looking for meaningful and rewarding work, the op-
portunity is there. CAT is hiring operators for its fixed-route bus service, as well as its CAT Mobility paratransit service for cus-
tomers with disabilities who are unable to use the bus. Pay rates are competitive, benefits are generous and opportunities for advancement are available.
These days Eckford works as CAT’s service planner/scheduler and can be found in front of the computer, instead of behind the steering wheel, planning operator schedules and routes. Determination and persistence led to Eckford’s shift in roles with CAT, which included working as a supervisor, dispatcher.

Safety measures continue amid continuing COVID-19 pandemic

Chatham Area Transit will continue requiring passengers on CAT vehicles to wear masks into next year to help prevent the spread of Covid-19, as required by the Transportation Security Administration. The TSA recently confirmed that the federal face mask requirement for all transportation networks, includ-
ing public transportation, will be extended through Jan. 18. CAT customers without a mask can request one from an operator.
The extension follows the continued rise of COVID-19 cases due to the Delta variant and hesitancy among residents to get the vaccine. While no vaccine is 100% effective, those who are vaccinated are less likely to contract the virus and for those who do, the symptoms are often mild and the chance of hospi-
talization is low.
To help get more people vaccinated, CAT recently hosted a free COVID-19 vaccination clinic at the Joe Murray Rivers Jr., Inter-

For more information about the COVID vaccine or to make an appointment, go to covid19.gatchd.org or scan the QR code to the right.

Try mobile ticketing
Scan the QR code with your phone’s camera to download the Token Transit mobile ticketing app and start saving today!
Safety measures continued from page 1

modal Transit Center. The pop-up clinic at the transit center was a collaborative effort between J.C. Lewis Primary Health Care Center, YMCA of Coastal Georgia, Healthy Savannah and REACH, a national program administered by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to reduce racial and ethnic health disparities.

The event was held two days after the U.S. Food and Drug Administration granted full approval to the Pfizer vaccine for the prevention of COVID-19 in individuals 16 years of age and older. The vaccine also continues to be available under emergency use authorization, includin for individuals 12 through 15 years of age.

“The FDA’s approval of this vaccine is a milestone as we continue to battle the COVID-19 pandemic. While this and other vaccines have met the FDA’s rigorous, scientific standards for emergency use authorization, as the first FDA-approved COVID-19 vaccine, the public can be very confident that this vaccine meets the high standards for safety, effectiveness, and manufacturing quality the FDA requires of an approved product,” said acting FDA Commissioner Janet Woodcock, M.D. “While millions of people have already safely received COVID-19 vaccines, we recognize that for some, the FDA approval of a vaccine may now instill additional confidence to get vaccinated. Today’s milestone puts us one step closer to altering the course of this pandemic in the U.S.”

CAT continues to implement additional safety measures in response to the pandemic, including enhanced cleaning and reduced capacity on fixed-route buses and CAT Mobility paratransit vehicles.

CAT experiencing service disruptions amid staff shortage, pandemic

Chatham Area Transit officials are asking customers for patience, as operations are impacted by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and a staffing shortage.

Similar to transit agencies throughout the country, the impacts from the staffing shortage and COVID-related absences are leading to disruptions that include unusual delays in service for customers of CAT’s fixed-route and CAT Mobility paratransit service.

CAT is working diligently to resolve these issues through a recruitment campaign and the continued implementation of safety measures, such as reduced vehicle capacities and COVID quarantines, to keep customers and employees safe.

“We want to apologize to our customers for the disruptions during these challenging times,” said interim CEO Valerie Ragland. “We ask for customers’ patience and understanding as we work to fill staffing vacancies during this continued pandemic, while continuing to follow the CDC’s safety requirements.”

CAT’s September meeting calendar
Listed below is the monthly schedule of public meetings for the Chatham Area Transit Authority that will take place in September. All of the meetings will be held remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The virtual meetings can be viewed live on CAT’s YouTube page at: www.youtube.com/chathamareatransit

CAT Board Committee Meetings
Date: Sept. 14
Strategic and Operational Planning: 10:30 a.m.
Performance Monitoring/Audit: 1 p.m.
External Stakeholder Relations: 2:30 p.m.

CAT Governance Committee
Date: Sept. 21
Time: 11 a.m.

CAT Board Regular Meeting
Date: Sept. 28
Time: 10 a.m.

While the opportunities for different roles within the agency are there, many of CAT’s operators have no desire to leave the driver’s seat. They enjoy their role as “ambassadors of goodwill” and pride themselves on providing such a vital service to the public.

The position offers generous benefits, including health, dental and retirement plan. Starting hourly pay was recently increased to $17.39 for fixed-route operators. That increases to $18.64 after a year.

Tom Parrish started working as an operator in 1986 and retired as an operator in 2020. The job can be challenging at times, but is also a rewarding one, Parrish said.

“When I accepted the job as a young man, I had no idea I was beginning a career,” he said. “Now 34 years and four grandchildren later, I’m happily retired and reflect on my career proud-ly.”

Interested in being part of the CAT team? Career opportunities can be found online at https://www.catchacat.org/about-cat/cat-careers/.

Scan the QR code with your smartphone’s camera to learn about the career opportunities at Chatham Area Transit.

Retired CAT operator Tom Parrish

Chief of Staff/Board Liaison Beverly Dumas

and trainer before obtaining her current position in 2017.

“When I didn’t get the position the first time, I applied again,” she said. “When the opportunity presented itself, I learned everything I could learn about it.”

Eckford’s story is not unique. Many employees have successfully pursued other interests at CAT. Beverly Dumas started working as a paratransit operator in 2013. After stints in customer service and behind the ticket window, she now works as CAT’s chief of staff, essentially serving as a liaison between CAT’s board of directors and chief executives. Her transition stemmed from her drive and from her colleagues’ support.

“I benefited from coming up under excellent trainers and mentors with the agency,” she said. “I found encouragement along the way.”

Chief of Staff/Board Liaison Beverly Dumas

A vaccine clinic was held at the transit center on Aug. 25

Go to CAT’s YouTube channel at https://bit.ly/2EAkR4k or by scanning the QR code with your phone’s camera.

Want to read past issues of CAT’s community newsletters? Go online to www.catchacat.org/media/ewews/ or scan the QR code to the right.

Send an email to marketing@catchacat.org to subscribe to our weekly electronic newsletter, the CAT Express