CAT selects recipient of vehicle donation program

Interim CEO Valerie Ragland hands a key to Savannah Royal Lions Youth Organization President Todd Rhodes on Dec. 2, when Rhodes picked up the vehicle CAT had donated to his organization.

Chatham Transit staff announced during November’s CAT Board meeting that the Savannah Royal Lions Youth Organization was selected as the first recipient of a new vehicle donation program. The Savannah Royal Lions Youth Organization is a nonprofit that offers sports opportunities, after-school tutoring and various community initiatives for young people 6 to 18 years old.

The donated vehicle, a 2014 Chevrolet Express Cutaway 4500 van, will be used by the organization to transport young people to sports practices and games, after-school tutoring sessions, camping and field trips, and community outreach activities.

“We are so pleased to hear that we were selected, and even more shocked to hear that we were the highest rated,” said President Todd Rhodes. “Our organization is here to be a blessing and a resource to the community. As a recipient of this vehicle, CAT will help us continue in this effort. Again we are honored to have been chosen and appreciate the opportunities transportation will allow us to undertake.”

The van is being donated as part of a new initiative launched in September that allows for CAT to give away surplus vehicles to eligible nonprofit organizations that serve Chatham County residents.

A CAT evaluation committee scored the Royal Lions the highest among 17 organizations that applied for the vehicle. The organizations were evaluated according to their demonstrated community benefit, service coordination and clarity and quality.

Interim CEO Valerie Ragland told the CAT Board that the selection committee said that picking a winner was a difficult process due to the quality of the applicants.

“They were all very deserving,” Ragland said.

CAT Board approves 2022 legislative priorities

Chatham Transit will pursue funding for improved and expanded services and facilities as part of the 2022 legislative agenda adopted by the CAT Board in November.

Two of CAT’s priorities will have some additional support after being included on the Savannah Area Chamber of Commerce’s 2022 state legislative agenda.

The Chamber-supported priorities include legislation allowing single counties, by referendum, to use the existing Trans-IT Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax statute to adequately fund transit capital, operations and maintenance needs. The revenue derived from the Trans-IT’s request for state funding to expand and enhance water ferry services along Savannah growing waterfront.

As part of the legislative agenda, CAT is also seeking funding for a regional transit training facility to help meet future needs for drivers, mechanics and support personnel. In addition, CAT is seeking funds for an electric vehicle maintenance and storage facility to include appropriate multi-use charging stations and support systems to expand the electric system.

The 2022 state legislative session is scheduled to convene on Jan. 10 and adjourn on March 31.

CAT giving away 10 free rides to vaccinated customers in December

From Dec. 1 through Dec. 31, customers will be able to receive a free 10-ride card allowing for 10 rides anytime on CAT’s fixed-route buses or a 10-ride ticket book for CAT’s paratransit service, CAT Mobility. To receive the 10-ride card, customers must have shown their COVID-19 vaccination card and a form of photo ID.

The vaccine card and 10 must be shown to the customer service representative at the ticket window of Joe Murray Rivers Jr., Intermediate Transit Center, 610 West Oglethorpe Avenue (Open 7 a.m.-8 p.m., Mon.-Fri.). Only the person obtaining the free ride card or ticket book can pick them up. No substitutes may be sent in their place. The free ride card and ticket book can also be loaded to a customer’s smartphone if they have the Token Transit mobile ticketing app. To receive the CAT Mobility ticket book, individuals must already be certified to use the paratransit service.

Recipients of the Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson vaccination are eligible for the free card or CAT Mobility ticket book. Customers must be fully vaccinated and they can only receive one free 10-ride card or CAT Mobility ticket book under the program.

CAT People: Operator Freddie Lamar

Bus operator Freddie Lamar shows off his 1964 Schwinn at CAT Central.

Back in 1977, a 33-year-old named Freddie Lamar began driving for what was then the Savannah Transit Authority.

With two daughters to raise, Freddie was looking for a job close to his house after a stint working as a bus driver for the school system. Forty-four years later, he can still be found behind the steering wheel a bus operator for what is now Chatham Area Transit.

“I love it,” he said.

As a people person, the position gives Freddie an opportunity to interact with the public on a daily basis. Riders now include the children and grandchildren of his first passengers, many of whom know him by name. There are plenty of new people too and with the increase in visitors to Savannah he has even had to use a language translator on his phone on occasion to help non-English speaking passengers. He has also had celebrities on his bus, including actor Bruce Willis, who he said borrowed his CAT hat to keep fellow passengers from recognizing him.

Freddie has represented CAT in many ways outside of the bus as well, including during outreach events to school children and repeated stints as Santa Clause and Tipper, CAT’s old cat mascot.

“It’s a joy making people happy when they come in,” he said.

About six years ago, Freddie retired from the job he loves. It took about two years before he came back. Now working on a part-time basis, he drives a morning shift each weekday driving the 12 Henry, the route he has driven for more than two decades.

Freddie said he doesn’t about the money. Getting up early to get people to where they need to go is like “going out to get a breath of fresh air.”

“That’s a beautiful thing,” he said. “It’s like being paid to get up and say good morning.”

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

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Scan the QR code with your smartphone’s camera to learn about CAT career opportunities.
Customer vaccination incentive (continued from page 1)

Did you get your COVID-19 Vaccination? Share your documentation and get a FREE 10 RIDE CARD!

Show documentation that you received your COVID-19 vaccine at the JMR Intermodal Transit Center Ticket Window. Our Transit Customer Advocate will validate documentation and then give you your FREE 10 RIDE CARD!

Vaccine Incentive Rules & Restrictions

- To receive a 10 Ride Card or CAT Mobility Ticket Book, customers must be fully vaccinated.
- To receive a CAT Mobility Ticket Book, customers must be existing paratransit riders.
- To receive a 10 Ride Card or CAT Mobility Ticket Book, customers must go to the Joe Murray Rivers, Jr. Intermodal Transit Center Ticket Window at 610 W. Ogletorpe Ave.
- No substitutes may be sent to collect the card or book for another person.
- Customers must present a valid photo ID along with their vaccination card.

Acceptable IDs:
- Driver’s license (temporary licenses acceptable)
- Non-driver ID
- Learner’s permit
- Passport (foreign & expired passports acceptable)
- Government employee ID
- US Military ID
- US permanent resident card

Holiday service alerts

CAT will run on a holiday schedule on Christmas Eve and New Year’s Eve. There will be no service on Christmas Day and New Year’s Day. Check CAT’s website at catchacat.org, or scan the QR code to the right for more information about these service impacts as they become available. Customers can also text RIDECAT to 41411 to get notifications about upcoming service impacts texted directly to their phones.

Determination and diversity driving CAT’s latest class of operators

Shawna Munson

Shawna Munson said her hijab has spurred some questions about her Muslim faith since moving to Savannah from Philadelphia with her husband and two teenage children last summer. She doesn’t mind. In fact she enjoys the interactions and meeting new people, Munson said.

“I just like to shed light on people and let them get to know me,” she said.

Her enjoyment in engaging with strangers is part of the reason she is looking forward to her new job as a bus operator for Chatham Area Transit. She also has a passion for driving and has been doing it professionally for about 22 years, including jobs with other transit agencies and strins behind the wheel of taxis, school buses, limousines and tractor trailers.

“I’ve driven almost everything you can think of besides a tanker truck," she said.

CAT customers can expect to see Munson behind the steering wheel of a CAT bus in early 2022. She is one of six new hires being trained as a fixed-route operator. On Dec. 2, when she was interviewed for this story, she was participating in her last day of classroom training.

Safety & Training Coordinator Glenn Golob was making sure the new recruits were well versed in CAT’s safety and operating procedures. Once they pass the written exam they move onto the closed course, where they are tested on various bus maneuvers before hitting the public roads on practice runs with Safety & Training Manager Jeffery Swinton.

Another operator in training, Montenique McFadden, said she was looking forward to driving the larger fixed-route buses after working hard to earn her commercial driver’s license. A native of New York, McFadden previously joined CAT in January 2020 as a CAT Mobility paratransit operator. She had to leave the job to take care of her children when the COVID-19 pandemic shut down in-person schooling.

Still she missed the experience of driving around Chatham County and serving CAT’s customers. With her children back in school, she found the opportunity to return to the job while also boosting her credentials.

“I was determined to get my CDL,” she said. “It’s been a year, but I’m back now.”

Keep up with CAT

CAT’s December meeting calendar

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

CAT Governance Committee

Date: Dec. 14
Time: 11 a.m.

CAT Board Regular Meeting

Date: Dec. 21
Time: 10 a.m.

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